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CUNNING MURRELL

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

TALES OF MEAN STREETS

A CHILD OF THE JAGO

TO LONDON TOWN

CUNNING MURRELL

BY

ARTHUR MORRISON

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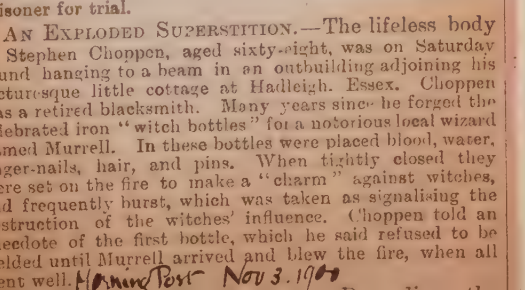
TO JOHN LOUIS WIMBUSH

My Dear Wimbush,—I think you will not yet have forgotten our holidays in old Essex, in the days ere the speculative builder had dreamed of Leigh, and when Hadleigh was still the Hadleigh of another century.

It is in memory of those times that I offer you my little story, headed with a name familiar to us both; and with the hope that it may please you to find among my puppets images —imperfect enough—of some other old Essex friends. For myself, when some tell me, as they will, that such a man as Murrell and such beliefs as he lived on were impossible in the time and place I give them, I shall know that you, at least, are better informed: for indeed you know Murrell's doings as well as I, and you have handled the amazing (and grimy) heap of documents that he left behind him. You can testify, too, that a man was swum for a witch (and died of it) in this same county ten years after the period of the tale. But there!—Yours always,

A. M.

Loughton, Essex, *June* 1900.



prisoner for trial.

An Exploded Superstition.—The lifeless body of Stephen Choppen, aged sixty-eight, was on Saturday found hanging to a beam in an outbuilding adjoining his picturesque little cottage at Hadleigh, Essex. Choppen was a retired blacksmith. Many years since he forged the celebrated iron "witch bottles" for a notorious local wizard named Murrell. In these bottles were placed blood, water, finger-nails, hair, and pins. When tightly closed they were set on the fire to make a "charm" against witches, and frequently burst, which was taken as signalising the destruction of the witches' influence. Choppen told an anecdote of the first bottle, which he said refused to be welded until Murrell arrived and blew the fire, when all went well. Morning Post Nov 3. 1900

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CUNNING MURRELL

CHAPTER I

NEWS AND A BOTTLE

THE sun was low in the haze that hid the hills about Tilbury Fort, ten miles up the Hope. Here, at the Thames mouth, where there was no more river, but salt sea, green marshes made the shore, and Canvey Island lay broad and flat and low, like a duller, thicker water rather than land, marked off from the shore by the Ray, pale gold in the reddening light. Deep in coarse grasses and salt sedge, with purple thistles between, Casey Marsh lay low and level for half a mile inland. Thence the ground rose, gently at first, then more steeply, to the irregular green ridge that backed the marshes far as eye could see.

Stately and grey on the boldest hill rose the ruined towers of Hadleigh Castle, mighty still in their decay, and imposing even because of their rent flanks and the vast thickness of wall there displayed.

About their foundations and clogged under-passages the fallen masonry was half covered with bramble and bush, and, lower, a thicker coppice fringed the hill and marked the foot of its steeper slope.

From the ruins the view was wide. Two miles along the marshes below, toward the east and the open sea, stood the fishing village of Leigh, its jumble of red roofs seeming to rest on the broad water itself, thick trees clothing the hill behind it, and its grey church tower standing high over all. Across the estuary, five miles away at its nearest, lay the Kent shore, now growing misty, and the quiet, smooth water between was dotted with the Leigh boats, like gnats on a pond.

From the lowest of the loop-holes in the castle's boldest tower the end of a brass telescope protruded, for there Roboshobery Dove kept his daily watch for the sole news of the outer world that he cared for—news of the war, in so far as it might be learned from the traffic about the Nore. For it had been his fortune, since the Baltic fleet had been at work, more than a few times to spy a sloop of war with a tail of captured Russian vessels, making across the Little Nore for the Medway mouth, on the way to Sheerness hulks and Chatham Dockyard.

The hole was far wider within than without, and among the boulders of ragstone Roboshobery sat snugly, his unstrapped wooden leg fixed in a crack, and so offering, with its wide socket, a convenient rest for the telescope. He was a large man, though his size was mainly a matter of breadth. His face was brown and round, and his broken nose gave it an undue appearance of flatness; nor was it the handsomer for the few large pock-marks that speckled its surface. His hair hung thick in iron-grey curls that were nearly black from beneath the hard glazed hat, which was the commonest head-gear in the neighbourhood alike for seamen and landsmen; and all of beard that was unshorn was the thick roll—sometimes called "monkey-choker"—that grew from ear to ear below his jaw. His green smock might have inclined the observer to judge him an agriculturist, were it not contradicted by the earrings visible among his thick curls; earrings that were a tradition and a matter of professional equipment among mariners for the bettering of the eyesight. So that, upon the whole, one would judge Roboshobery Dove a retired seaman with rustic connections, which guess would be correct.

The sun grew redder in the haze, and the

Thurrock hills bit into its lower edge; the Leigh roofs were duller, and the sea-line to the east was lost in the rising grey. Down in the coppice shadows grew thick, and the light was gone from the tops of the tallest thorns. Nests were settling to rest with diminishing twitters, save where a nightingale, hoarse with summer, began his broken song. A rabbit peeped out on the hillside, scampered three yards madly, and stopped to nibble; and another joined it. Then the sun was a mere fiery edge above the mist, and in the east a speck of light broke out in the gathering dark. At that the watcher took his eye from the telescope and shut the instrument hastily. The Nore Light had recalled him to a sense of time. The wooden leg was on the stump and buckled in scarce three movements, and Roboshobery Dove, with an agility characterised rather than hampered by the rigid limb, scrambled to the ground and hurried off toward the lane behind the hill. For though, of course, wooden leg notwithstanding, he was afraid of nothing and nobody, and the old women's tales of the bedevilment about the castle after dark were not seriously to be considered, still there was no need to stay now that it was growing too dark to see a sail a mile away. And

moreover, there was news to tell, for three Russian vessels—mere brigs, it was true—had been taken past the Grain Spit scarce two hours back.

The lane was low and dark in the hollow behind the hill. Thence it climbed gently, throughout its half-mile of length, to Hadleigh village. Early on the way a cottage looked down from a bank, and at its garden rail a girl stood.

Roboshobery Dove raised his telescope and hailed, though, indeed, the girl had been watching for him. "Three," he said. "Three through in the art'noon. But no good—coastin' brigs an' that. Wonnerful few good prizes lately—took 'em all, I count."

"No frigate?" The girl's voice was subdued but anxious.

"Frigate? O—convoy, you mean. Lor' sink me, no. They woan't send frigates to mind a row o' wash-tubs. Ye woan't see the *Phyllis* this side o' October — more like November." Roboshobery grinned, and wasted a wink in the gloom, for he understood. Then, as the girl turned at a sharp call from the cottage, he went his way up the lane.

Bats flitted over his head, and followed him as he tramped the steadily-rising path, but no other

living thing came near till he stood on higher ground than the castle hill, and was within stone-throw of Hadleigh street. For the dark castle lane was no popular resort after dusk. One might meet the White Lady, or perhaps her victim, Wryneck Sal, and there was the man that hanged himself in the castle barn. True, the year was 1854, and in London everybody was surprisingly enlightened, and all a great deal wiser and more knowing than any of their fathers before them. But Hadleigh, thirty-seven miles from London by road, was a century away in thought and manners; it knew nothing of the railway beyond what the literate among the village fathers might read in an old copy of the *Chelmsford Chronicle*: sowed beans with a dibble: was generally much as it was in King Charles's time: and had not discovered its forefathers to have been fools. Indeed, when at last the railway actually came in sight a mile away on the marshes below, it brought no station to disturb Hadleigh, but went its journey and left the village to sleep for another thirty years.

So that Roboshobery Dove met nobody in the lane—not even the White Lady nor the Black Man—till he had topped the rise and was again out of

darkness and in twilight. But here he spied a friend, and hailed again.

"Steve, O! Steve Lingood, ahoy!"

The man stopped and turned; a tall, hard fellow of twenty-eight, in a fur cap and leather apron; a smith visibly, and nothing but a smith.

"Well," he asked, "news?"

"Three little 'uns—nothen but shore-scrapers; come to the pot-rakin's, 'twould seem. Banham ha'n't brote in a paper, hev he?"

"Banham ha'n't been out—the gal's that bad young Dick took the cart."

"War, war, bloody war, north, south, east, an' west—an' Banham stops home to nuss a big gal, 'stead o' goin' to Chelmsford reg'lar an' bringin' a paper o' noos! But to-morrow's fair day, an' there's sure to be some brote in. What's so bad with the gal?"

"Dunno. Sort o' allovers, 'twould seem. Banham, he's gone to Cunnin' Murrell, an' Murrell's brote me a little job over it."

"Iron bottle?"

Lingood nodded.

"Witchcraft an' deviltry! Well, he's a wise 'un, that's sarten; but I don't count to hev nor make with sich truck."

"That's as it fare. To me it's shilluns an' pence—no more. Though I've 'arned it this day, double, an' done nothen. If I was like some I'd say my fire was as far bewitched as Banham's gal, or else the iron. Can't make nothen of it; won't shape, won't be jown up—obs'nit as a lump o' stone."

"'Tis the witch, depend on't," said Roboshobery, with a serious bating of voice. "She do feel the spell a-makin', an' puts the trouble on the iron. . . . Sink me, there's Master Murr'll hisself!"

Lingood turned his head. The lane ended beside a row of half a dozen wooden cottages, all of Hadleigh village that was not ranged along the Southchurch road. A little old man, in act of opening his door, espied the two, dropped the latch, and came toward them. Lingood moved to meet him, and Roboshobery followed indeterminately, going wide as he went.

The little old man presented the not very common figure of a man small every way proportionately. He was perhaps a trifle less than five feet high, thin and slight, but the smallness of his head and hands somewhat mitigated, at first sight, the appearance of shortness. Quick and alert of movement, keen of eye, and sharp of face, Cunning

Murrell made a distinctive figure in that neighbourhood, even physically, and apart from the atmosphere of power and mystery that compassed him about. Now he wore a blue frock coat, a trifle threadbare, though ornamented with brass buttons, and on his head was just such a hard glazed hat as was on Roboshobery Dove's. Over his shoulder he carried a large gingham umbrella, with thick whalebone ribs, each tipped with a white china knob, and from its handle hung a frail basket. He nodded sharply to Roboshobery, who backed doubtfully, made a feint of pulling at his forelock, jerked out "Good evenin', Master Murrell, sir, good evenin'," and took himself off into the dark. For Cunning Murrell was the sole living creature that Roboshobery Dove feared, and it was Roboshobery's way not only to address the wise man (when he must) with the extremest respect, but to do it from a respectful distance; much as though he suspected him of a very long tail with a sting at the end of it. And he stayed no longer than he could help.

Murrell turned to Lingood. "Job done?" he piped, in a thin but decided voice. "Job done?"

"No," the smith answered, "'tarn't; an' not like 'twill be, seems to me. You'll hev t' unbewitch

the iron, or the fire, or summat, 'fore you can get to unbewitchin' Banham's gal."

"Why?"

"Iron won't weld, nohow. Won't be jown up. Never met nothen like it; obs'nit as flint."

"Ah, we mus' see—we mus' see. 'Tis a powerful mighty witch, doubtless." Murrell said this with a sharp look upward at Lingood, who was suspected of less respect than was common in Hadleigh both for Murrell himself and for his foes, the witches. And the two turned toward the village street.

Murrell stopped at his door and entered, while Lingood waited without. The small room into which the door opened seemed the smaller because of the innumerable bunches of dried and drying herbs which hung everywhere from walls and ceiling. Murrell put down his frail and umbrella, and then, after a few moments' rummaging, blew out the rushlight, and rejoined Lingood.

"Come," he said, "try the job again." And the two turned into Hadleigh street.

The smithy stood a hundred and fifty yards beyond the Castle Inn, and on the other side of the road. All was black within, save where the fire declared its dull red. Lingood groped, and

found a lantern, and, after a little trouble, lit the wick of the guttered pile of grease within it; while Murrell, behind him, passed his hand twice or thrice over the hot cinders of the fire, though, indeed, there seemed little reason for any man to warm his fingers on a June evening such as this.

"Do you forge, Stephen Lingood," he said, with a voice as of one taking command, "an' I will blow this stubborn fire."

He seized the lever and tugged, and with the blast the glow arose and spread wide among the cinders. The smith lifted from the floor a clumsy piece of iron, partly worked into the rough semblance of a bottle, and dropped it on the fire.

"Here stand I, an' blow the fire," said Murrell, as one announcing himself to invisible powers; "an' let no witch nor ev'l sparrit meddle."

Lingood said nothing, but turned the iron in the fire. Slowly it reddened, and then more quickly grew pale and fierce, while Murrell tugged at the bellows. He muttered vehemently as he tugged, and presently grew more and more distinct, till the smith could distinguish his words, howsoever few of them he understood.

". . . creepin' things, an' man on the Sixth Day. . . . Power over all creatures. . . . An' by the

name of the Angels servin' in the Third Host before Hagiel a Great Angel an' strong an' powerful Prince, an' by the name of his star which is Venus, and by his seal which is holy; . . . I conjure upon thee Anael who art the chief ruler of this day that you labour for me!"

Neither surprised nor impressed by this invocation, Lingood seized a hammer, carried the radiant iron to the anvil, and hammered quickly. The mass lapped about the anvil's horn, met, and joined; and without more words the job was finished. With another heating an end was closed, and with one more the mouth was beaten close about a heavy nut. Then the thing fell into the tank with an explosive hiss and a burst of steam, and the neck was shrunk on the nut, and the work done.

"Well, it 's a nation curious thing," Lingood said at length, screwing a short bolt, by way of stopper, into the nut that made the bottle's mouth; "it 's a nation curious thing that iron 'oodn't work proper before. Might a'most ha' thote it was filin's or summat chucked on the fire. But nobody 'ud do that, an' there 's no filin's about."

Murrell shook his head. "Stephen Lingood," he squeaked, "them as bewitched your fire agin my lawful conjurations needed use no mortal

hands. Den't you feel, Stephen Lingood, as you forged and I blowed, with words o' power an' might, den't you feel the ev'l sparrits o' darkness about you a-checkin' an' a-holdin' you, hammer an' arm?"

"No," answered the smith stolidly, taking his pipe in his mouth and groping in his pocket for tobacco. "No, I den't."

"No," Murrell pursued, without hesitation, though with a quick glance; "you did not. Sich was the power an' might o' my words, Stephen Lingood."

The smith lit his pipe at the lantern, and for answer gave a grunt between two puffs. Then he said: "I 've a mind to go an' see how Banham's gal is myself. D'ye go there now, Master Murr'll?"

It was not Cunning Murrell's way to cultivate any closer personal acquaintance than he could help with anybody. Detachment and mystery were instruments of his trade. "No," he said, "I go first home for things I need."

CHAPTER II

THE DISCOVERY OF WITCHCRAFT

LINGOOD closed the smithy and came into the street. It was such a night as June brings, warm and clear and starry. Half Hadleigh was abed, and from the black stalls and booths that stood about at random in the street, waiting for to-morrow's fair, there came neither sound nor streak of light. The smith walked along the middle of the street among these, and at last turned into a narrow passage by the side of the Castle Inn. Once clear of the house-walls, he traversed a path among small gardens distinguished by a great array of shadowy scarlet runners, and the mingled scents of bean and wallflower; and so came on a disorderly litter of sheds about a yard, with a large cottage, or small house, standing chief among them. The place was on the ridge that looked over the marshes and the Thames mouth; near by the Castle Lane, and between the village

and the cottage, lower on the hill, where Roboshobery Dove had first delivered his tidings of war. Lights were in the lower parts of the house. The circumstance would have been remarkable at this late hour on most other nights of the year, but on the evening before fair day Hadleigh housewives were wont to be diligent in the making of Gooseberry Pie long after the common hour of sleep; Gooseberry Pie being the crown, glory, high symbol, and fetish of Hadleigh Fair, and having been so from everlasting. But it was no matter of gooseberry pie that kept awake the household of Banham the carrier. For on the sofa in the living room sat, or lay, or rolled, young Em Banham, moody or flushing, or sobbing or laughing, and sore bewitched, by every rule of Murrell's science. Bed she would not go near, nor had done for two nights. Food she refused, and cried that all drink burned and choked her. Other troubles she had, too, and once had had a terrifying fit. A man of medical science would instantly have perceived it to be a case of extreme hysteria. But out in this forgotten backwater of civilisation, where such another case had never been heard of, the Hadleigh vocabulary could offer no better word for poor little Em's affliction than that she was

"took comical"; the word "comical" being generally useful to express anything uncommon, or beyond the speaker's power of explanation, and implying nothing at all of comedy; often, indeed, telling of something much nearer tragedy.

Lingood clicked the latch, and a man opened the door. It was Banham himself, a shortish, shaven man, with weak eyes and an infirm mouth. The light fell on Lingood's face, and Banham turned his head doubtfully and reported within, "'Tis Steve Lingood."

"Arl right; let him in, can't ye?" answered a female voice, in which weariness, anxiety, and natural ill-temper had their parts. So Banham pulled the door wider, and said, with a vague cordiality: "O, come yow in, Steve; come yow in. 'Tare rare fanteegs we're in; but the missis, she—she——" and the sentence tailed away to nothing, as was the way of many of the unimportant Banham's sentences.

Lingood stepped straight into the keeping-room and into the presence of the Banham family, of which the majority, as to number, was ranged up the staircase at a corner of the room; those of ten or eleven on the lower stairs, and the rest, in order of juniority, on those above; the smallest

and last of the babies signifying his presence on the upper landing by loud wails. Mrs. Banham, a large, energetic, but slatternly woman, whose characteristic it always seemed to grow more slatternly and to spread more general untidiness the more energetic she showed herself, sat in a chair with her hands in her lap and a blue glass smelling bottle in one of them. Opposite her stood Mag Banham, the first-born, a stout, fair, blowzy girl of twenty or so. Both were contemplating the sufferer, a girl of sixteen, haggard and flushed, who sat on a sofa, rocking her head and shoulders, looking piteously from one face to another, and now and again twitching one cheek with the monstrous semblance of a wink.

"O, mother! O, Mag!" she moaned indistinctly, "I do fare that bad! Yow woan't let me suffer mother, will ye? Mag, yow love me, doan't ye? An' father——"

"Ah, my gal, we'll see ye better soon," said the mother, and Mag murmured sympathetically. "Yow den't ote to give way so, deary," Mrs. Banham went on. "Master Murr'll's to putt ye aw to rights."

"Yow doan't pity me, mother," the girl pursued,

beseeching all present with her eyes; "yow doan't pity me!"

"Ees, deary, us do, all on us. Take a drink o' barley watter, do, to squench the fever;" and Mrs. Banham offered a quart jug. But the patient would have none of it, thrust it away angrily, indeed, and moaned anew. "An' when I'm dead you'll arl say ye're sorry, p'r'aps—no, yow woan't, you'll be glad I'm a-gone!"

Mrs. Banham looked despairingly up at Lingood. "She do sit like that," she said, in a whisper that all could hear—"she do sit a-dolouring like that arl day an' night, for bed she'll hev none of. And then—fits. Who should putt the ev'l tongue on the gal thussens? Dedn' yow see Master Murr'll? He were comin', an' we bin waitin' on him."

Even as she spoke the latch lifted, and Cunning Murrell was at the door, umbrella and frail basket on shoulder. At this there was trouble on the stairs. For the long train of little Banhams, in all stages of undress, the whole proceedings were matter of intense interest and diversion. But while those behind pushed forward rebelliously against their seniors, these latter, though holding to the foremost places, were more disposed to push back; partly in awe of the wise man whom half the

country held in fear, but more in terror of their mother's vigorous hand, which had already driven back the reconaissance twice in course of the evening. So that instant on Murrell's appearance a riot arose on the stairs, a scuffle and a tumble, and, amid a chorus of small yells, little Jimmy, all ends up, came bursting though the advance guard, and sprawled on the floor with his shirt about his neck.

"Ow!" he cried. "Ow! Bobby shoved me downstaers!" And with that Mrs. Banham left jug and smelling-bottle, and seizing Jimmy by a leg and an arm, drove back the column in panic, and shut the stair-foot door.

"Good t' ye arl," said Murrell, in his small, sharp voice. "I see smoke from your bake-hus, Mrs. Banham. Be the fire well rastled?"

"Ees, an' I 'll war'nt that 's hot. I 've arl that yow spoke of, Master Murr'll, in the ketchen.'

Murrell took the iron bottle from the frail, and followed Mrs. Banham into the room behind. There was a sound as of something poured, and a low conversation.

Banham looked helplessly about him, and began again: "'Tare rare fanteegs we're in, Steve, sarten to say, an' it do dunt me arltogither. But the missis, she——"

"An' they be toe as well as finger nails complete?" came Murrell's quick voice, as the two returned.

"Ees, that's arl as yow told me, Master Murr'll, an' here be pins an' needles."

Murrell shovelled them from his palm into the bottle, and dived again into the frail. Thence he brought dried leaves of four sorts, and these were stuffed in after the pins; and last went a little heap of horse-nails.

"Do you screw it hard, Stephen Lingood," said Murrell, "with your strong fingers."

Lingood took the bottle and screwed the stopper down as far as it would go.

"Now 'tis ready, neighbours," Murrell squeaked, "an' you give aer to what I tell. We go arl to the bake-hus—an' come you, too, Stephen Lingood, for true witness. An' mind you arl," he went on with gusto, for he enjoyed the authority his trade gave him, "once the bake-hus door shuts on us, not a word mus' one speak. What I hev prepared will putt sore pain an' anguish on the hainish witch that hev laid the ill tongue on this house. 'Tis a strong an' powerful spell, an' 'haps the witch may be druv to appear before us, bein' drawed to the sput in anguish; 'haps not; 'tis like that's a

dogged powerful witch, an' will stay an' suffer, an' not be drawed. But come or stay, not one word mus' be spoke, or the spell makes nothen. If come she do, she'll speak, with a good axcuse, that's sarten, that some here may be drawed to answer, an' break the spell; or may make count to meddle with the oven; so heed not her words, nor make one sound. But 'haps she won't come."

Banham shuffled uneasily, and looked at his wife. But she stooped to Em and took her arm. "Come," she said, "we're goin' in the bake-hus, Em, to cure ye."

The girl had ceased to rock herself, and now stared sullenly at the floor. "I'm afeard," she said; "feard o' the witch."

"There's no call to be feared," the mother answered; "us be with ye, an' Master Murr'll, with proper deadly power over arl witches. So come now." She took her firmly, and presently the girl rose and went.

Banham took the rushlight, and, shading it with his hand, went last of the group into the yard. The nearest of the outbuildings was the bakehouse, scarce three yards from the kitchen door. From its chimney white smoke rose, and when the door was opened the smell of wood fire was sharp in

the nostrils. Murrell turned and took the rush-light from Banham, shaking his forefinger and tapping his lips as he did so, to remind the company of his orders. When all were within he shut the door, and lifted the latch of the brick oven. The fire was over high for baking, and the white ash had scarce begun to settle over it; even the bricks glowered a murky red, and cracked as Murrell raked the embers with a hook. A cut faggot lay on the hearth, and of this he flung in a good half, so that the fire burst into a clamour of crackles and a hum of flame. When it seemed at its highest he pitched the iron bottle into the midst, and all crouched and waited.

Lingood began to hope that the bottle was not altogether steam-tight after all, and by signs induced the others to keep as far as possible from the oven. The patient was calmer now, and quiet, viewing the proceedings with a dull curiosity, her head against her mother's shoulder. Lingood stood by the wall, and sucked a little nervously at his pipe. He feared an accident, but it would never do to spoil the arrangements now, or at any time to set in question anything done by Murrell, who, as everybody knew, was the most learned man in Essex. As for Mag and her father, both sat and stared,

open-mouthed, much as Jimmy and Bobby would have done had they been admitted to the bakehouse.

Presently a slight sound was heard from within the oven, and Lingood knew that the steam had found a tiny vent at the screw-stopper. But it was tiny indeed, and it was only because of the perfect stillness that the faint hiss could be heard at all. Even the rushlight was noisier.

And then, as all listened, there was a sharp sound without. It widened every mouth and eye, for it was the click of the gate in the outer fence. There was a louder clap as the gate slammed to, and then the sound of footfalls nearing the bakehouse. Only Lingood, because of his position, could see though the window, or would have dared to look. He saw but a dark figure, and, as it passed the window, a white face. And with that the door opened.

The women shrank together, and Murrell turned, stooping still, to face the entrance. On the threshold an old woman stood—a pale old woman in rusty black. With a skin clear almost beyond nature, she had a firm, perhaps a hard mouth, and overhanging brows, thick and grey and meeting in the middle. Howbeit her expression was rather one of fortitude than of harshness.

She looked about the bakehouse as in some sort discomposed by the gathering, and then said, nodding toward the oven, "I could see you were hottin' your oven this late, Mrs. Banham, an' I thote 'haps you might let me put in a bit o' bread-stuff 'long o' yours." She faltered and looked doubtfully at the silent company. "If that be no ill-convenience," she added apologetically, and produced a full white cloth from under her shawl.

There was no answer, though every eye was on her. It was plain that she was uneasy. "My niece Dorrily hev made a gooseberry pie," she pursued, "but with that we den't want to trouble ye, thinkin' that Mrs. Cheadle were a-bakin', though it seem she a'n't."

Still nobody spoke. Em clung to her mother, shaking and staring, and all the nearer choking for the hand Mrs. Banham laid across her mouth to keep her quiet. Murrell raised his finger to maintain the silence, and gazed keenly in the old woman's face. Banham's jaw had dropped till it could drop no farther. There was a still pause.

"I wouldn't ask," the old woman went on, ill at ease and perplexed, "but the bricks be fallen out o' my oad oven, an' that Dan Fisk that was to mend it, he den't come."

Still not a word. There was something hostile, and more than hostile, in the general gaze, and the old woman, bewildered still, now spoke with some acerbity. "If you woan't," she said, "there's no harm done, though a civil answer 'ud cost ye nothen. 'Haps the oven's full o' some oather thing, but leave that as may be, the least you give a beggar's an answer, neighbours. 'Taren't your habit to keep a shut mouth, Mrs. Banham."

Mrs. Banham gave no reply but a glare of hate. There was sign of a sob breaking through the hand that was over Em's mouth, and then——

The oven door shot through the window, and the place was full of flying embers and stinking steam. Blinded and half-stunned, everybody scrambled at random, and the first distinct sound after the deafening bang was the shrill voice of Murrell from the midst of the rout. "'Tis done, and done well! So go arl ev'l sparrits from out o' this household, an' so be the witch hurt an' tormented an' overthrowed!"

Overthrown the old woman was, in truth. The oven sill was something near four feet from the ground, so that their crouching position had saved the cunning man and his clients, who, save for a

fright and a few burns, were little the worse. Lingood, too, in his corner, had no more to lament than a hole or two scorched in his clothes, but the old woman lay still, with a cut in her cheek, for she had been standing almost in the path of the explosion. When the rushlight had been found and relighted Murrell pointed. "See," he said, "'tis done, an' done double. Blood drawed above the breath!"

And, indeed, it was plain that the shock had wrought a change in Em, for she was laughing quietly. It was not the unpleasant, noisy laughter, full of hiccups, that had signalised the sole change in her gloom in the last few days, and she spoke cheerfully. "To think 'twere Mrs. Mart'n! But there, I knowed it arl along. 'Tis done now arl-together an't it, mother? I'm a-well now, Mag. But I knowed it were Mrs. Mart'n arl along, den't I, mother? Ha, ha! Ees, sarten to say!"

Lingood lifted the old woman's shoulders, and made to loosen her bodice about the neck.

"Fling her out, Steve Lingood, fling her out!" cried Mrs. Banham. "Let her gownd choke her if 'twill, an' let the devil hev his own!"

But Lingood stolidly rested the woman against his knee, and began a clumsy attempt at restoring

her. "You've had your will," he said, "an' now 'haps you'll give her a cup o' watter."

Banham, whose meek vacuity not even an explosion could destroy, after a gaping pause to assimilate Lingood's meaning, took a step toward the door, but stopped at his wife's command.

"Yow stay where yow be, Joe Banham!" she cried furiously. "Let me see yow bring bit or sup for that darty witch that hev put the ill tongue on your own flesh an' blood darter! An' if 'tis watter yow want for her, Steve Lingood, there's a foison o' watter in t'hosspond for sich faggits! Taake an' swim her!"

"She ote to be drownded," said Mag, "if drownd she 'ool."

And Murrell added his rebuke. "That queer me, Stephen Lingood," he said gravely, "to see you aidin' and comfortin' so wicked a witch. Since you've touched her, take her out an' leave her to God's will."

Lingood, fumbling awkwardly and looking for help in vain, was aware of a quick step in the yard, and with it an urgent voice. "Mrs. Banham, Mrs. Banham! is't an accident? Is my aunt here?"

The voice was at the door, and in another moment a girl in a print gown was within, kneel-

ing by the old woman—the girl who had asked news of the war that evening of Roboshobery Dove. "O, what is't?" she cried. "Mrs. Banham, be she hurt?"

The answering torrent of abuse stupefied the girl, but in its midst the old woman opened her eyes and made a move to rise. The girl began to wipe the blood from her cheek, but Lingood nodded sharply toward the door and lifted her by the shoulders.

"Yes—come; come out," the old woman said faintly, as the smith aided her steps. But the girl stood in amaze. She, too, was clear-skinned and pale, with long black hair; and her firm black eyebrows exhibited, though in a less degree, the family peculiarity of a join at the meeting. She faced the storm with little understanding, though she heard her aunt called a witch again and again.

Presently she found speech to exclaim: "She's no witch! Master Murr'll, what ha' you been at?"

But her aunt pulled her by the skirt and commanded: "Come! Come yow away, Dorrily!"

And so they went with Lingood into the lane.

CHAPTER III

PROLOGUE MISPLACED

THE cottage overlooking the castle lane was in more than one sense a habitation apart from Hadleigh, and it had been so for long. For the Martins were "foreigners"—that is to say, they came from fifty or sixty miles off along the coast, and what was of much more serious importance, they were connected with the coastguard. In 1831 great changes were made in the revenue service, and it was then that John Martin and his wife came to the Leigh station. Now in those days the revenue service was not popular in this part of the coast—nor, indeed, in any other part. Smuggling was a great trade—not quite so great here as it was in parts of Kent, perhaps, but a large enough trade considering the thinness of the population, and a paying trade. Indeed, it was carried on with something more of impunity than in the famous smuggling districts on the south

coast, where both smugglers and King's men were more numerous and more active. The nearest guard station after Leigh was at Shoeburyness, almost seven miles along the coast, and the men were few. More, they were familiar and native to the district, and apt to be very luke-warm friends of the King, it was hinted; and certainly they were no very bitter enemies of the smugglers. As for the old riding officer that trotted harmlessly between, usually along the main road behind the cliff-ridge, and safely out of sight, he was regarded less as a terror than as an object of pleasant entertainment and a runner of fool's errands for the amusement of the idle humourist. It is possible that this was not the only part of the coast where similar conditions existed; but under King William great changes came. Men were moved into strange districts, were forbidden to marry among their new neighbours, and were made to live as much apart as was possible. So, in the general shifting of the pieces in the game, John Martin and his wife, humble and inconsiderable pawns, were put down in the midst of the enemy at Leigh, Mrs. Martin's brother, Reuben Thorn, going with them, and taking his wife too.

The force of repulsion between the revenue men

and their neighbours came not alone from the King's side, in shape of regulations. For if the service men were loth, as in duty bound, to associate with those about them, these latter on their side regarded with a natural suspicion and dislike the strangers who were come among them to overset the pleasant course of life to which they were accustomed; not only to cut off the easy supply of good liquor and good tobacco which was felt to be every man's elementary right, but also to cut off the source of much prosperity to freighters and venturers, and of liberal and easy wages for every man who could carry two tubs on a dark night. There was a jealous watch, too, for informers and babblers (though, in truth, they were rare enough), so that, for their own sakes, few displayed an ambition to contract relations of any sort with the coastguard, and there was a great difficulty in finding lodging for the men and their families.

John Martin and Reuben Thorn had long house-hunting troubles, and got over them at last by renting between them the cottage over Hadleigh Castle Lane. It was empty and badly out of repair, and it had a vaguely evil name, in some indistinct way acquired from the memory of the man who hanged himself in the castle barn. But

it had advantages. First, after so long lying empty, it was cheap; it enabled the two related couples to live together, and share expenses; and it was some little way removed from other cottages, so that the men could come and go without being under common observation. It was the property of one Simon Cloyse, of Leigh, a man of Dutch descent, like many hereabout. He was a "warm" man, of various trades; he kept an inn and a shop; he held shares in divers fishing craft; sometimes he lent money; but it was said that he, as well as his father before him, had done best out of smuggling. Not as an active smuggler, taking personal risks, for it was never Sim Cloyse's way to take a risk of any sort; but as a freighter, who found as much of the money needed as would enable him to take to himself best part of the profits. To keep such transactions wholly secret in such a community as that of Leigh were an impossibility, but it was a fact that nowhere, and at no time, could the keenest eye have detected a single scrap of positive evidence connecting Sim Cloyse with a contraband operation of any sort. Still matters seemed so to fall out that few of the active and more daring smugglers, the boat-captains and the like, but found themselves, in

some mysterious way, in Sim Cloyse's debt—a condition no Leigh man was ever known to get out of. Golden Adams, in particular, a daring and perhaps a rather quarrelsome young fellow, was said to have run a rare rig on Sim Cloyse's money for a while, and now to be growing desperate in consequence.

In other circumstances the superior officers might have looked with disfavour upon the relation of tenant and landlord between the coast-guardsmen and this honest jobber. But it was this house or none, and a regular inspection of rent receipts made debt on that score an impossibility. So John Martin and Reuben Thorn took up their quarters and brought their wives and Martin's little son, young John; and perhaps, on the whole, the women quarrelled less than might have been expected. After a little more than two years, indeed, they quarrelled not at all, for Mrs. Thorn died; died in giving Reuben Thorn the child who was called Dorrily. She was the second, but the first had died at a day old.

So Mrs. Martin took the child and reared it, and little John and his cousin Dorrily grew up together and played together, much apart from the other children of Lady Sparrow's School at Leigh;

for the Leigh fishermen were a desperate hard lot, the coastguardsmen were their natural enemies, and their children carried the feud to school with them ; though, indeed, not many of the fishermen's children went to school at all at that time.

By the time that John the younger was twelve and Dorrily eight, there had been no change in the fortunes at the cottage. Martin and Thorn had rowed guard, walked patrol, and once or twice fought fiercely with smugglers, and they were much as ever save for a trifle of ageing and a scar or two. Then there came a wild winter night when the brothers-in-law went out together for guard and never came back. It was not till the morning that Martin's wife knew they had gone off shore, for none of the men themselves knew his own night's duty till he was told off. And six hours later still, the water being little less rough, a boat was found bottom up and stove, and that was all. There was talk of three men being sent to watch for smugglers approaching a suspected sunk "crop" of tubs, but neither guard nor "crop" was ever heard of again, though the tubs were dragged for exhaustively. So it grew plain that no "crop" was there, and that the boat had come to grief in the bad weather.

The blow was staggering enough, and, though she met her fortunes bravely, Mrs. Martin never wholly lost traces of the wound. The isolation in which the household had lived made the double loss of brother and husband the bitterer; more, ways and means must be considered. Both John and Reuben had been thrifty, sober fellows, and there was a little prize-money saved to eke out the "compassionate allowance"; and soon the boy began life on a fishing-smack; but the struggle was hard enough.

Simon Cloyse behaved well on the whole. He was no very lenient landlord in general, but now he did not turn Mrs. Martin out, for he had no other tenant to put in her place. He even allowed a small reduction of rent when he found she could never pay the full amount. And, by one means and another, the fight was won. John earned wages of a sort, and his mother did a little field work now and again, and so the years went.

Now that there were no coastguardsmen in the house the neighbours might well have grown more friendly. They did so, in fact. But Mrs. Martin had acquired a habit of detachment, which was slow to leave her, and for some while after her trouble she had other habits unattractive to the

neighbours. She had long fits of silence, and, at times, fits of talking to herself. She would disregard the presence of others, and even pass hours in company with the children, without in any way regarding their existence, though, indeed, her affection was beyond the common. And once she was found in the castle barn gazing at the rafter from which the traditional suicide had hanged himself, and she was taken home by force. She grew better as time went, however, and as her troubles fell away from her her fits of brooding were rarer, and at last they ceased altogether. So that the passage of years, in some small measure, wore away the barriers between Mrs. Martin and her neighbours. But then it came to pass that young John, grown big and tall, and a skilled seaman, was himself accepted for service in the coastguard, and so the barriers rose again.

Still they were scarce such stark barriers as before, for things had changed. Smuggling had altogether declined, as a regular trade, within the ten or twelve years since the two cousins were left orphans, though it still persisted in a small way, insomuch that the knowing men of Hadleigh, Leigh, and Canvey got whatever of brandy and hollands they might need for private use without

obtruding the transaction on the notice of the customs officers. The Queen's men were more efficient, though they were few enough even now, and though the gap of seven miles still lay between the stations; so that it was no longer a matter of ordinary experience for a late watcher to peep from his window and see a procession of pack-horses, with muffled feet, passing through Hadleigh street on the way inland, each with its two double ankers, or a file of men similarly employed with half-ankers; and no longer could the neat housewife afford to polish her window panes with strong gin, as in old times. But though no more small fortunes were made in smuggling, any comfortable householder in the neighbourhood would have conceived himself tyrannously ill-used if he were altogether prevented from supplying himself with the good drink to which he had been accustomed, at a price inconsistent with entry at the customs office. And a little later, when the regular coast-guard (and Jack Martin among them) had been drafted off to the war, and an odd lot of substitutes were attempting their duty, it were a clumsy smuggler indeed who could not go aboard a Dutch lugger and bring away anything he needed, in reason.

Thus it was that although, as was natural, no great cordiality existed between the coastguard and the villagers, these latter were not so ill-affected toward the revenue men as in the days when they were at war with a profitable trade. And when they went away to fight the Russians they became even popular characters; for every smuggler in Essex had ever been a patriotic Englishman, and Roboshobery Dove, old man-o'-warsman, fisherman, and retired smuggler, the most positive patriot of them all.

Young Jack Martin and Dorrily Thorn were parted by all the sea that lay this side of the frigate *Phyllis*, with the Baltic fleet; but a broken half of the same sixpence hung about each of their necks, and when Roboshobery Dove winked invisibly in the dark lane it was because he knew that young Jack was grown more than cousin and old playmate to the watching girl.

CHAPTER IV

A DAY OF FEASTING

IT was the way of Hadleigh Fair to begin betimes on Midsummer Day morning, so that it had pushed Hadleigh village almost out of sight before breakfast was generally in progress. It was not great among fairs, perhaps, but neither was Hadleigh great among villages. The Fat Lady came there, and the Living Skeleton, and, one fair in three, the Fire-eater of Madagascar, when free from engagements before All the Crowned Heads. There had been two Mermaids within living recollection, though the last, as a sight, was considered unworthy the penny admission; but the really great exhibitions that graced Rayleigh Fair a month earlier—Wombwell's, Clarke's, Johnson and Lee's—these rarely or never took stand at Hadleigh. So that there was all the more money left to buy gingernuts, bull's-eyes, ribbons, and—more important than all—Gooseberry

Pies. And if the Fat Lady, and the Living Skeleton, and the rest of the prodigies were not enough, the sight-seer would find peep-shows everywhere—half a dozen of them at least. And as to every other sort of stand, booth, stall, shanty, or wigwam, they made Hadleigh village a town for the day, whereof the chief population was contributed by Leigh, Prittlewell, Eastwood, Rochford, Bemfleet, Canvey, Hockley, and a score more parishes. Little was spent in the serious matters of cattle, horses, and farm produce at Hadleigh Fair, and the dealings—beside those in Gooseberry Pie—were mainly in ballads, spicenuts, penny toys, gown pieces, garters, peppermint stick, china and watches sold by Dutch auction, and gingerbread bought outright or knocked down by the expert with a stick.

The visitors from a distance bought their gooseberry pies at the booths and stalls, except such as had friends living in Hadleigh, with home-made pies of their own. The home-made pies were in general esteemed superior, because of a greater substance in the crust and a more liberal disposition of fruit. Those at the stalls, though handsome, plump, high, delicate, round, and full to look at, had a disappointing way of collapsing "aw to

crumbles" at the first bite of a healthy jaw, revealing in the remains the hidden chamber of air that had given the pie its goodly seeming; a hidden chamber filled and widened, it was commonly reported, by a puff of the bellows under the paste before baking. Moreover, to put no more than four gooseberries in a penny pie was justly regarded as an act of rapine. The home-made pie, on the other hand, offered something for the teeth to get to work on. Made in the biggest pie-dish available, it was roofed over with a noble arch of crust, solid and enduring, more often than not made of bread-dough an inch thick; and its complete filling of gooseberries left no room for air. It was a piece of politeness to exchange wedges of this pie among friends, or even, for them that aspired to a gentility beyond that of their neighbours, to exchange little separate pies made for the purpose: with the accompanying message: "Please, mother say will you accept of a bit o' gooseberry poie?"

The person thus addressed was commonly as well assured of the coming of the pie as of the coming of fair-day, and might even have witnessed its hazardous transport through crowds of merry-makers the length of the village. But it was good

form, nevertheless, to affect ineffable surprise and delight at the present, and to make the return in kind (if, indeed, the present were not itself a return compliment) with expressions of depreciation of her own handicraft. "I am that ashamed arlto-gether . . . if your mother will axcuse . . ." and so forth.

And so the gooseberry pie circulated with the proper compliments, the gingerbread was knocked down, ballads were bought and rolled up, the girls and women "argle-bargled" for gown pieces and garters, and all things went very merrily together. At the Castle Inn and the Crown the thirst induced by spicenuts and peppermint and the general circumstances was quelled in many pots of "thruppenny"; but again those with friends in the village had the advantage; for in half-a-dozen of the better keeping-rooms at least the man of the house would shut the door with a wink, and elicit from some obscure retreat a bottle; a bottle charged with cognac or hollands of a strength and quality that were a sufficient certificate of origin to the man of experience.

Very early on fair-morning Roboshobery Dove was astir, and planting out young cabbages in his garden. He stood on a plank, and used his wooden

leg as a dibble, driving a proper number of holes at suitable distances apart. This done, he loosened the buckles, knelt, and set and packed his plants in the holes thus prepared. Ever he kept an eye on the road for early arrivals, for that way came all passengers from Rayleigh, Pitsea, or Bemfleet, and he greatly desired a peep at yesterday's *Chelmsford Chronicle*, if by chance a copy might have been brought in.

His breakfast he took in two instalments, before and after the planting out, and then left his cottage to the care of the old woman who "tighted up" for him. Spick and span, in a clean green smock, with his hat shining in the sunlight, Roboshobery Dove stumped down the road to the village, now busy and gay. A group of small children with daisy chains on sticks went straggling along in mock procession, singing each his or her own perversion of the old rhyme:

Oliver Cromwell lay buried and dead,
Heigho! buried and dead!
There grew a green apple-tree over his head,
Heigho! over his head!
The apples were ripe and all ready to drop,
Heigho! ready to drop!
Then came an old woman to gather the crop,
Heigho! gather the crop!

Oliver rose and gave her a crack,
Heigho! gave her a crack!
That knocked the old woman flat down on her back,
Heigho! down on her back!
The apples are dried and they lie on the shelf,
Heigho! lie on the shelf!
If you want e'er a one you must get it yourself,
Heigho! get it yourself!

The perversions all had for their object the substitution of gooseberry pie for the dried apples, and therein they were made to succeed regardless of metre, to the demoralisation of the whole poetical structure. Roboshobery Dove had shouldered his stick, by way of keeping character with the procession as he caught it up, but ere he quite did so the children checked their march, and the train closed into a whispering group and strayed out into the road. Roboshobery looked up and saw Dorrily Thorn, pale and sad, coming along the path.

"Mornin'!" said Roboshobery, raising his hand in salute. "That aren't a fair-day face, my gal!"

"I 'm tired, Master Dove, an' ailing a little," Dorrily answered, and sought to pass on. But the old man lifted his wooden leg as a barrier, and, bringing it down, took a pace to the left, confronting her with a grin on his broad face.

"*O, Johnny's gone, what shall I do? John's gone to Ilo!*" he half said, half sung, and added: "Don't yow fret. He'll be home a'mos' soon as yow could knit him a puss. With a medal, too!"

And with a chuckle and a flourish of his stick above his head, as an expression of naval and military glory, Roboshobery pursued his walk. The children stared from across the way till Dorrily had turned the corner at the cross roads, and then went on with their song.

Roboshobery Dove stumped along among the people and the stalls till he came near the Crown and opposite a little front garden where a red-faced and white-headed villager in shirt sleeves leaned on the gate and smoked his pipe.

"Morn', Henery!"

"Morn', Bosh!"

"Hev yow seen e'er a paper o' noos?"

"No, I an't. Den't see ye las' night."

"True 'tis. I kim up late from the look-out. Three prizes yes'day art'noon; no sense o' prizes, though—bits o' coasters."

"Um!" Mr. Prentice stood erect, rubbed his hand through the white hair behind his head, and jerked his pipe toward his open front door. "Hev

a nip," he said, and went up the garden path with Roboshobery behind him.

It was a neat keeping-room, that lighted by the front window, with a tall clock and a wavy looking-glass that made the gazer's face an undulating nightmare. Old Harry Prentice brought a black bottle from the blackest corner of a dark cupboard, and two glasses. At the lifting of the cork a scent stole about the room, the soft scent of old white brandy, such as never is on sea or land in these meaner days.

"Ah!" Roboshobery said, sniffing gratefully and holding his glass to the light; "this is it!"

He gave it the water it needed, nodded to his host, and rolled a gulp about his teeth. Then he look at the glass again, and said, "That's a few years sen' that drop kim over, I warr'nt."

"Ah, 'tis," answered the other. "It do come pretty good now, but not like this."

"An' not so much of it."

"No, not so much of it." Mr. Prentice's eyes wandered toward the tall clock by association of ideas. For the clock stood on a loose floor-board, and the loose floor-board covered a space big enough for as many tubs as would make provision for the thirst of the latter years of a man already

old. "But, Lord," he went on, "I doan't see why, now. These here coastguard chaps as they got temp'ry, them aren't worth nothen. Why, poor oad Stagg, the ridin' officer, dead twenty year, he 'd a' done better 'n them, arl the lot. An' *he* were no sense o' use. Why, if I was younger, an' needin' a stroke o' trade, I 'd hev a cargo run now, easy."

"Ay, 'twould be no trouble, I 'd wager. I wonder some o' the sharp 'uns don't try. Oad Sim Cloyse, eh?"

"Him or anybody. 'Tis easier than any time this thutty year. Yow could land a cargo on Canvey a'most by daylight, an' night—Lord, anywheres!"

"I lay it 'ud ha' bin done if Golden Adams was about now. He 'd soon ha' found a freighter with the brass."

"Ah, he would. Mayhap he 's a-done it where he be now—over in Sheppey. Though that 'ud be a mile harder job."

Roboshobery Dove pulled out a knife and a hard plug, but paused ere he cut. "Missus out?" he asked.

"Yes. She 's full o' the noos. Hear about Banham's gal? She 've bin bewitched, so the women do say."

"Ay, I hear tell." Dove spoke with a more hushed attention. "An' Master Murr'll, he were hevin' a witch-bottle made with young Steve Lingood."

"That 's so. Well, the witch-bottle 's made an' bust an' arl, an' the gal 's better; an' they found the witch—so them says as believes in 'em." It was the way among the more intelligent in Hadleigh to add some such saving clause to any reference to the subject of witches.

"Cuther! Found the witch, eh? Who is 't?"

"Young Jack Mart'n's mother."

Roboshobery's jaw dropped, and he caught his quid with a quick snatch of the hand. "What!" he cried, "Mrs. Mart'n! No!"

"Ay, 'tis so. An' 'tis arl about, too. There aren't a woman in Hadleigh 'ud take a bit o' pie from her to-day; no, nor nothen else. Nor go near her."

"Mrs. Mart'n!"

"Ay; an' some do say her niece is bad as she."

Roboshobery stared, open mouthed, for ten seconds. Then he brought his fist on the table with a shock that made the bottle jump. "'Tis a lie, damme!" he said. "'Tis a lie!"

"Very like. But they do say it."

"Why, her boy Jack be a fightin' the deadly Rooshans this very minute!" Roboshobery pursued, with a fixed stare, and a logic of his own.

"An' they do say 'tis proved agin her."

"An' I fit the French meself, when I was that high, damme!" Roboshobery went on regardless, with the same stare and the same logic, extending his hand a little higher than the table.

"Well!" Prentice ejaculated, impartially, and finished his glass.

"That high, damme!" Roboshobery repeated without moving his hand. He kept it in the air for a few seconds, and then let it drop, and gave his mouth the quid again. "Howsomdever," he went on, "if the women sez it, they'll stick to it, an' argufyin' woan't change 'em." And then, with fresh heat, he repeated: "But it 's a lie!"

"There be Jobson o' Wickford," Prentice said, suddenly rising and looking through the window. "It 's odds he 's got a *Chronicle*."

The two men hastened to the door and hailed Jobson of Wickford, who was pulling up at the Crown. As it happened he had brought a copy of yesterday's paper with him, for the first Hadleigh friend who might demand it; and soon Roboshobery Dove, with pains and slow spelling,

was informed of the war news. And ten minutes later he had Steve Lingood by the arm at the smithy door, and was confusing the news of the burning of the docks at Uleaborg and Brahestad, and of the retreat of the Russians from Silistria, by a mixed process of telling it verbally with five or six diversely-pronounced names for each place, and insisting on the smith reading for himself, while the paper was violently brandished about his face and ears.

CHAPTER V

AN INTERRUPTED SONG

HADLEIGH Fair waxed and roared. It was not the way of Cunning Murrell, in general, to be seen at daytime; his was a silent, sudden presence of the night, and there were tales of the distances he travelled (and hints of the means whereby) that were told in whispers only, and not to strangers. But on fair day he was sought by the sick and the troubled of many villages, and he dispensed herbs and charms to many that travelled half across the county to fetch them. There were, indeed, those who came farther, for Murrell's fame as physician and cattle doctor spread across the county, even to the Suffolk border, and he was esteemed far beyond Bedlow of Rawreth, who was a most distinguished character; while in matters of greater abstruseness and difficulty, the baffling of witches, the recovery of lost property, and the bringing to the altar of

fickle lovers, he had no rival whatever. But it was not his way to sit at the receipt of custom, taking in turn the many that resorted to him. Rather he must be sought and solicited, and they were the lucky that were able to buy his counsel. So that one might always see throughout the most of fair day, in the narrow lane where his cottage stood and away from the merry crowd in Hadleigh street, certain pensive women and a few anxious girls, their eyes solicitously turned toward the cunning man's door, their hands all willing to click the latch, though each fearful of rebuff; sometimes, too, an awkward and shame-faced man. So it was in the lane this day. But in the noisy street the round of gaiety spun with a dazzle, and in the afternoon, long ere the Fire-eater had palled or the Fat Lady had ceased to amaze, the customary fight had broken out between the warriors of Hadleigh and those of Leigh. The Leigh men, easily distinguished by their blue guernseys, but well enough known individually, never allowed any day of rejoicing to run many hours without a fight; and Hadleigh was as ready for Leigh as Leigh could wish. Conspicuous, though not large, among the Hadleigh champions was Buck Murrell, disgraceful and degenerate son of the soothsayer;

short, thick, and shock-headed, hatless and fierce, he was ever where the fray raged closest, and this day he headed the rush up the stairs of the Castle Inn that drove the few Leigh men in the clubroom (made another taproom for the day), out by the window, and down the post of the inn-sign (reached by a jump from the sill) hand-over-hand to the street. It was because of this irregular escape that, a week after, tenterhooks were driven in the post—the tenterhooks that remain to this day, witnesses of the prowess of Hadleigh and of the seaman-like agility of Leigh in the year 1854.

Soon the fight took half the attention of the fair, and peep-shows were overset. More, one corner of the Living Skeleton's booth gave way, and brought the canvas about Mag Banham's ears, and those of young Sim Cloyse, who was taking her a-fairing; and such was her discomposure and affliction that gin and peppermint was necessary to restore her, and she had to be restored more than once. Then, toward five o'clock or so, the scrimmage grew slack; for some bodily refreshment, some measure of three-penny, is needed to maintain the activity of the most valorous champions. And when the noise of battle arose again, it was less in volume than it had been in the afternoon, and the combat itself

not so brisk; for the measures of threepenny that spur warriors to conflict are apt at the same time to impair their might, and to pull away the legs from under them. Till at last, when the final skirmish tailed away into a meadow by the four-wont way, somebody was inspired to drive a startled and disconcerted cow into the meadow with the shout: "The bull! look out for the bull!" Whereat the champions of Leigh, already somewhat out-numbered and in no very able state to make zoological distinctions, went for the nearest hedge and cleared it, and the fight was done. For extreme distrust of bulls and a great disinclination to remain in the same field with one, made a singular failing of the fishermen of this coast; though one might have been sadly put to it to find another earthly creature wherewith to daunt them.

The peep-shows were picked up and packed up, the Living Skeleton took down the remaining three corners of his habitation, and the Fat Lady bethought her of supper. At the Castle Inn and the Crown late rallies were made of revellers yet unwearied, and young Sim Cloyse and Mag Banham wandered together through Dawes Heath Lane, amid gathering shadows and evening odours, somewhat characterised by peppermint.

At the Castle Inn, taprooms and bars were full of them that still thirsted after threepenny; but the parlour was given over to a privileged group of tradesmen and respectabilities, and no threepenny entered there. There sat Prentice, Steve Lingood, Banham, Dan Fisk the builder, and a dozen others, some from neighbouring parts, immersed in the enjoyment of pipes, beverages, and mutual improvement. There was some disposition to perceive a weakness in the drink, perhaps because it really was the custom to water it on fair day, perhaps merely because it was the infirmity of jealous human nature to suspect it.

Dan Fisk, a thick-set humourist with a squint, rotated his pot before him, as though to enrich the liquor with whatever sediment there might be, and shook his head. "Carl that six-ale, 'em do," he said, "an' what's wuss they charge it. . . . Well, well, 'tis fair day!"

"'Tis poor stuff, sarten to say," Prentice remarked.

"Rotgut an' belly-wengeance," Fisk assented. "Nothen moer;" and he smelt it contemptuously. "It do seem that the way to brew sixpenny for fair day be to take thruppeny an' double it with watter. That's bad as what oad Sim Cloyse's wife used to brew, an' we arl knowed that!"

"I den't know it," Lingood said. "She've been dead nigh twenty year."

"Ah, you're a young 'un. Oad Sim Cloyse's missis, she were twice as near as oad Sim were—real Dutch. She coon't bear to see nobody eat nor drink, she coon't. Why, when oad Sim kep' fowls (he took 'em off the widdar Mead for rent) she swore he'd ruined hisself. 'What's the good o' giv'n' they fowls corn?' she said. 'They onny eat it!'"

Dan Fisk took a pull or two at his pipe, so as not to interfere with the laugh, which was prolonged by Banham, who had heard the story before, but wished to be polite.

"Well," Dan resumed, "when Sim Cloyse took the Ploughboy, along there by the Pest'us, afore he made his money, he putt his missis to mind it, an' there were precious little trade. Fust night—'Well,' says Sim, 'what ha' yow took?' 'Nut a farden,' says she; 'nut one.' Nex' night Sim kims in an' draws hisself a pint o' six. 'How's trade?' says Sim. 'Wusser 'n yesterday,' she says, ''cause yow've bin an' drunk a pint o' six without payin' for it, an' if yow're ruined it'll sarve ye right!' An' Sim never drunk no more o' her beer. Well, night arter that he kims agen, an' he says, 'Trade

better?' he says. 'Wusser 'n ever,' she says, with a snap; 'look at that there winder!' An' there were the biggest winder arl smashed to shivers. 'Why, how's that?' says Sim. 'Why,' says she, 'the fust customer kim in to-day. He had a pint o' thruppeny. When he'd a-gulped it, he went pale as pudden, an' his eyes turns up into his head. Then he goes red, an' his eyes kims down agen, an' he swore and ranted, an' hulled the mug through the winder an' tore off like Bedlam.' 'Yow don't say!' says Sim. 'Well, praise be he den't hev a pint o' six, or he'd ha' knocked the house down!'"

Dan Fisk sucked hard at his pipe again, and squinted joyously. Two great thumps on the steps without checked the general guffaw, and an obscure man in a corner took the opportunity to say: "When the bahloon fell at Barl'n' in eighteen-twenny-eight——"

But with that the door burst open, and Roboshobery Dove, with a third great thump of his wooden leg, came in in state. For he was a person of consequence in the parlour of the Castle, and his downsittings and uprisings were considered with respect. He was a man of travel—or at least he had sailed in a King's ship as a boy; he was also a man of some little substance, for he did no work

but such as pleased his leisure in his little garden; and there was the wooden leg. It was the practice and tradition to account for his left leg as lost in his country's service, and indeed it was in a sea-fight that the knee was smashed. But an ill-wisher, if Roboshobery had had one, might have declared with truth that the fight was a common fisherman-smuggler affray of the usual murderous sort, with a crew of Dutchmen, off the Great Sunk.

"Good evenin', Master Dove," cried Fisk. "We knowed your footstep!"

"Neighbours ahoy!" Dove answered, with his customary salute, as he stumped across to a vacant seat by Banham. His green smock was gone, and in its place he wore his Sunday coat—blue, with brass buttons.

Preferring the rum he had ordered in the bar before the divers pots pushed toward him, Roboshobery Dove, his wooden leg extended to the middle of the floor, hauled at a long twist-knotted cord till a massy silver watch emerged from his fob. This he took by the bow, gravely banged it three times, edgewise, on the wooden socket that clipped his thigh, and clapped it to his ear; finishing by looking at the face and announcing the time. "Quarter pas' nine, more or less," he said,

'an' glory be 'tis fair day, or some o' your wives 'ood a-bin arter ye."

Banham was made a little less retiring by the celebrations proper to the day. He seized the watch suddenly, and shook it before the company. "Ah," he said, "there's a watch! there's a watch! That watch is a werge, that is! 'Tis said Master Dove's father gave fi' pound for that watch! An' it's a werge."

"Ah!" Roboshobery remarked, complacently filling a long pipe, "that is. An' my father gave fi' pun for it at Foulness. Give us hold."

"Master Dove be a Foulness man," Banham went on, as one proclaiming an undeniable quality in his hero; "a Foulness man, as be well knowed."

"Ay, sarten to say," assented Prentice.

There was a silence, and the obscure man began again—"When the bahloon fell at Barl'n' in eighteen-twe——." But here Jobson, of Wickford, whose head had been slowly inclining toward his knees for some time, so that he seemed like to pitch forward out of his chair, suddenly sat up and demanded: "An' what's the wuss of a man if he be a Foulness chap? Eh? That arn't no sense of a argyment. What's the wuss if he be?"

"Ah, sarten to say," murmured two or three, soothingly.

"Arn't a Foulness man good as a Hadleigh man, or a Bemflit man or a Rochford man, or—or what not?"

"Course he be," Prentice grunted pacifically.

Jobson of Wickford looked at his friend for several seconds. Then he said, "Arl right, then, arl right!" let his pipe fall, and began to nod again.

"There ha' bin many fine men o' Foulness," said Lingood. "There were the seven Allens, an' Jack Bennewith, that fought the London prizefighter."

"Ah," Banham struck in, "an' 'twere a Roboshobery Dove o' Foulness as fit King Charles an' got his head chopped off."

"No," objected Lingood, "'twere King Charles that lost his head, I do read."

"An' Roboshobery Dove," Prentice corrected, "he fit *for* King Charles, bein' a parson, an' were hulled out o' chu'ch therefor. Aren't that so, Bosh?"

"Ay, 'tare," Roboshobery confirmed, basking in the general homage. "An' I were christened such arter him by special recommendation o' Master Ellwood the parson. 'Tis arl a possibility,' he

says to my father, 'that yow be descendants, an' anyhow,' he says, ''tis a fine handsome name.'"

"That it be," assented Banham. "I hoad a pound there aren't anoather man with hafe sich a name, not in arl Essex!"

"An' so he christened me," Dove concluded. "Ah, he were a parson o' th' oad sort, were Master Ellwood. Wore silver buckles to his breeches, an' slep' in his wig; an' his walkin' stick were five foot long."

Some such conversation as this was usual in the Castle parlour when, Roboshobery Dove being present, it was desired to exhibit him for the admiration of strangers. Commonly it led to long and amazing yarns of his adventures, from the time of the French war down to yesterday; and nearly always to one or more of his forecastle songs, of which he had a curious and diverse store, not always composed to please the squeamish. But to-night Roboshobery turned the talk to the war, and, by the aid of the crumpled newspaper from his pocket, was presently expounding the state of affairs, from Archangel to Varna, to the instruction and mystification of everybody. Being brought to a stand by nothing but a paragraph which set down the damage done in Brahestad

dockyard at 350,000 silver roubles, and then not so much by the doubt as to whether the figures should read thirty-five thousand or three hundred and fifty millions, as by the blank impossibility of guessing how much a silver rouble might be.

Meanwhile, without, the wonted calm of a summer night fell about Hadleigh. The Fire-eater, the Fat Lady, and the Living Skeleton, all were gone, and the street was empty, save now and again for a home-goer carrying an overload of threepenny on unsteady legs. Except at the Castle Inn, most were in bed; in the little row of wooden cottages that included Cunning Murrell's home, all certainly were, save Murrell himself, who, after a long spell of shadowy activity behind the blind of his keeping-room, at length blew out the rushlight and stepped noiselessly out of door.

It was one of his customary night journeys, without a doubt. The umbrella was over his shoulder, and the frail basket depended from its handle. The curious of Hadleigh had once or twice seen herbs taken from that frail, herbs gathered, no doubt, at a proper hour of night, and with the right formalities; but what else it might carry was matter of dark wonder and secret surmise. Just as were his night walks, such as this.

He walked in the lane a little, still without noise. Presently he crossed to a stile, climbed it, and went off across the meadows in the direction of the ridge and the sea; and so vanished unheard into the night.

Minutes went in the deep stillness that is so full of tiny sounds, of leaf, and grass, and beetle; and in the village a dim light or two went out. There was an effort at song in the taproom of the Castle Inn, which broke down in the second verse, and ended in laughter and debate. The hint was not lost on the parlour company, however, and presently, the windows being open, Roboshobery Dove's voice was audible from end to end of Hadleigh and beyond:—

A merry man o' money stood a-boasting on the quay,
"O, I have a ship, and a gallant ship is she;
And of all the ships that sail she's the best upon the sea,
And she's sailing in the Lowlands low."
Lowlands! Lowlands!
She's sailing in the Lowlands low!

The chorus came with such a will that a hurried and angry step in the passage by the inn was unheard, and Mrs. Banham, come to fetch her husband home, had the parlour door open ere the longest-winded of the company had quite done with the last syllable.

Banham was excitable, but ten fair-days, together with all their accompaniments, could not have driven him to defy his wife. Instant on her appearance he rose, with "Arl right, missis, arl right. I were just a-comin'," and, abandoning his pot, reached the door ere she had time to get out more than a sentence of the shrill reproaches she was charged with. But she spared him none of them, and the parlour company, with serious faces, heard them as the couple passed the window, and heard them still till distance overcame her voice.

"Come," said Prentice, "never mind that. Next werse, Bosh!"

Roboshobery Dove, something discomposed by the interruption, took a drink, and presently went on, gaining spirit and volume as he went :—

"For I had her built of the good oak tree,
And the name I gave unto her was the Golden Vanity,
And I freighted her and manned her, and she bore away to sea,
And she's sailing in the Lowlands low."
Lowlands! Lowlands!
She's sailing in the Lowlands low!

Then up steps a sailor-man a-walking on the quay,
"O, I was aboard of your Golden Vanity
When the look-out was aware of a rover of Sallee,
And we sunk her in the Lowlands low."
Lowlands! Low——

Every mouth was at its widest, when the door was dashed open again and revealed Banham.

"A run!" he cried. "There be a run o' tubs! 'Haps a fight. Coastguard's burnin' a blue flare, Sou'chu'ch way!"

The chorus stopped, but nobody shut his mouth. A night-run of smuggled goods was a thing so wholly dropped out of every man's experience of late years that for a space nobody stirred nor spoke, but all gaped at the carrier.

Roboshobery Dove, albeit his song was ruined, was first to start up, not forgetting to empty his tumbler as he did so. And in ten seconds from that the parlour stood empty, and the whole company was running, hobbling, trotting, scuffling, or stumping, according to age and circumstances, into the castle lane and over the meadows, toward whatever point promised to give a good view along the ridge and the shore. For if the coastguard were burning a blue light at Southchurch, it could but be to call help from Shoebury and Leigh, and that could mean but one thing. It was witness to their forgetfulness of ancient habits that all, without hesitation, ran freely to see. In the old times every man not actually engaged on the run would have kept back lest he were seen and suspected.

Jobson of Wickford, floundering sleepily in the rear, sprawled over a mixen and fell asleep again. But the rest persevered, and even the last and worst-directed got a glimpse of the distant light ere it burned out. A party of six or eight, with Roboshobery Dove among them, kept together and made their best pace along the cliff edge toward Leigh, Dove maintaining the pace and keeping his wooden leg clear of traps and holes with a surprising address. He judged the light to have burned somewhere on the cliff over the Mill Gut, and he was puzzled to account for any smuggler who knew the coast selecting for a landing a spot so vastly less advantageous than a dozen others thereabout.

They kept their way till Leigh village lay below them, black and silent. Here they were stopped by the rectory garden wall. The Nore light, out at sea, and the light on Garrison Point at Sheerness stood constant in the vast dark, and nearer moved the lights of two small ships, beating up to the Thames. Not the lap of an oar nor the fall of a foot could be heard, and curiosity began to slacken. It was remembered that three more miles lay between Leigh and the Mill Gut, and the flare might even have been burned farther along still. It was very late, and after all there might be nothing to

see. So it was resolved to turn backs to the shore and strike across a waste and two bean-fields for the road. If there had been a run, and the tubs had got through, they would probably be brought that way.

"Though," said Prentice, "a run arn't likely on Midsummer night."

"That doan't argufy," Dove answered. "'Tis dark enough, an' there 'll be anoather sort o' coast-guard here in autumn, when the Baltic fleet come in."

They were crossing the waste, and picking their way between many gorse bushes. Presently in the midst of the group a patient voice began: "When the bahloon fell at Barl'n' in eighteen-twenny-eight I were in a tunnip fi'l' with——"

"G'lor!" exclaimed Prentice. "Who's that?"

"Where?"

"*I* see summun or summat," said another of the party. "Arl black. Stud up out o' the fuzz bush, den't it?"

"Ay—under my nose a'mos'; an' he be gone. 'Twere a man or a ghost, sarten to say!"

"Den't yow see him, Steve Lingood?"

"Ay, I thote I did. A man, I 'd say; a little 'un."

All stood and stared into the empty air about them. Then said Lingood: "Not hap to be Cunnin' Murr'll out on his night walks, eh? . . . Else he 'd ha' spoke. Hey! Master Murr'll! Master Murr'll! Be that you?"

The echo came back clear and sharp from the rectory wall, but not another sound.

"Get along, neighbours," urged Dove. "Man or devil, we want none of his deviltry. Get along."

Across the two bean-fields they trudged, and along the road from Lapwater Hall into Hadleigh; but saw no more visions, of man, devil, nor blue light, nor heard aught save their own voices.

CHAPTER VI

A HOUSE APART

THE fair was over and gone, but Hadleigh was left simmering. Not Hadleigh alone, in fact, but Leigh also bubbled with gossip and conjecture in the matter of the mysterious blue light on the Southend cliffs; for a mystery it was found to be, after all. The coastguard at Leigh had seen the signal, and had hastened that way from their several patrols, till they had met the Shoeburyness men coming in the opposite direction. These, it seemed, were also hurrying in response to the flare, which they had supposed to be the work of the nearest Leigh patrol. After certain groping and stumbling, and a great deal of explanation and swearing, it grew apparent that no coastguardsman had burned a blue light at all, and that there was nothing whatever to call for their presence in force at Southchurch. On the other hand, if the whole thing were not a practical

joke, it was extremely probable that some strategist had intentionally brought them together at this spot in order to throw the rest of the coast defenceless. And, this probability realised, it became expedient for every man to scramble back to his post at the best pace the darkness would allow, keeping eyes and ears open the while. All for nothing, however. Not a man was able to report a light, a footstep, or an oar-splash that could be called suspicious; though for not far short of three hours of dark night the way had been open anywhere along seven or eight miles of coast, save only at the most unlikely places just about Southchurch and Southend.

For many days the men of Leigh grinned one at another and winked; though, indeed, they were as much in the dark as the coastguard, who for a week afterward were dragging and "creeping" with hooks and grapnels all over the Thames estuary, in the hope of laying hold of a sunk "crop" of tubs. Old Sim Cloyse, in particular, was very curious to understand the business, and the fuller of questions and conjectures because, as he explained, he himself had been in bed and asleep when the adventure came to pass. But at any rate for any cause or none, the coastguard were

made to look foolish, and were given a deal of fruitless work, and so the men of Leigh and Hadleigh made merriment at their expense. Fishermen dropped overboard elaborate booby-traps, old baskets, dunnage, and junk, to be hauled up, slowly, painfully, and hopefully, on the drags and hooks that were cast for a more valuable catch. And the searchers were greeted, at their landing, with pleasant and deferential inquiries after their good fortune.

"Good evenin', sir," a leather-faced ruffian would say, with a low comedy duck and a pull at his forelock. "Any sport, sir? Hot weather for draggin', sir. Ketched any moer oad barr'ls, sir?"

But when Roboshobery Dove next saw Prentice at his garden gate, he jerked his thumb Leighward, and both old stagers winked. "Oad Sim Cloyse, eh?" said Roboshobery.

"Ay, he be a deep 'un," said Prentice.

Still, by a long comparison of notes among the likely men of Leigh, it grew apparent that not one of them had been "out" that night; and at last, since nobody else had lit the blue flare, it was plain that it must have been the devil. This opinion, indeed, prevailed in Hadleigh ere long, perhaps because of a revived interest in works of

darkness consequent on the notable detection of Mrs. Martin's witchcraft.

She had been put to bed by her niece on the return from Banham's bakehouse, still a little sick and dazed. In the morning, however, she had risen with an apparent forgetfulness of the events of the night, and set about her usual preparations for breakfast, while Dorrily, busying herself likewise with household matters, watched her furtively, dreading to make any allusion to what was chiefly in her mind.

Presently her aunt said: "Dorrily, the bread be very low. Den't us bake yesterday?"

"No, aunt," the girl answered, anxiously. "The —the oven 's broke, you know. Some bricks fell."

The old woman looked fixedly at her for a moment, and then, as with sudden recollection, said: "Ay, so 'em did. It do fare awkward. You mus' go an' see Dan Fisk, Dorrily, an' ask him what he 'll charge."

The lapse of memory amazed Dorrily. She wondered at first if her aunt merely affected to forget the affair of last night by way of ignoring a painful subject. But soon it grew plain that this could not be the case.

"Pity I den't think of it," Mrs. Martin said, pass-

ing her hand across her forehead and down the cheek where last night's scar was. "Some one else might ha' let me use their oven. You better get your bonnet, Dorrily, an' ketch the meller at the fower-wont way."

The woman was pale and drawn, and her odd lapse of memory alarmed the girl. So Dorrily set out with a troubled face, and it was so that Roboshobery Dove met her on her way to catch the miller, who passed the four-wont way with bread at eight in the morning, or sooner. She saw how her appearance had broken up the train of singing children and driven them across the road, and she was not slow to understand. Plainly the Banham family had been up betimes, and the tale was abroad.

She bought a loaf, and took her way back behind the village, away from the busy road. Her nature was, and her life had schooled her, to meet trouble with resolution, but now she was conscious of an added loneliness and an added fear. Both were vague and of an ill-defined presence, but both were there. When one has few friends the cutting-off o one leaves a great gap. The loss of her father and her uncle was no more than a childish memory, but her parting with her cousin Jack a few months ago had left her and her aunt very lonely; and

now, though why she could not guess, the events of last night and the old woman's state this morning affected her as would the realization of another parting.

Jack was away, in daily peril of shot and shell, and, after her aunt, there was nobody, scarce an acquaintance. Roboshobery Dove was friendly enough, it was true; but so he was to everybody else, except perhaps Cunning Murrell, whom he held in a distant awe that had a trace of aversion in it. Steve Lingood was very kind, too, last night especially; though he was curiously shy and indifferent, and, it would seem, disliked to meet her, for she had seen him avoid it. And there was one other very persistent, but very unpleasant, acquaintance, young Sim Cloyse, of Leigh, who now, however, seemed to be consoling himself with Mag Banham for the rebuffs he had suffered at Dorrily's hands ever since Jack had gone to sea. But these counted very little in Dorrily's eyes; Jack was away, and now——

As breakfast finished, and as other things fell to be dealt with, a certain abstraction grew upon Mrs. Martin, as of one striving to call to mind some name or some circumstance that persistently eluded the memory; and she spoke scarce at all. Pre-

sently, however, as she busied herself with things out of door, her face cleared somewhat. Merry noises came down-wind from the village, and children were singing. It was not often that any inhabitant of Hadleigh could look over his garden fence without seeing a little Banham somewhere, and now from the garden of the black cottage there were half a dozen in sight at least. A row of four climbed on a fence thirty yards off, and one or two, smaller but more daring, skirmished closer. Dorrily saw her aunt stoop to a gooseberry bush and gather a handful of the fruit. Little Jimmy Banham, losing sight of her when she stooped, came up close by the gate at the moment when she opened it, gooseberries in hand. She smiled and nodded at the child, and offered the fruit; whereat little Jimmy, with a yelp of terror, turned and ran; and the climbers on the fence got down on the far side.

The old woman stood, astonished; and as she stood there came the cry from the fence—"Yah! oad witch! Oad witch!"

Mrs. Martin turned with a dawning agony in her face; and as she did so, a lad across the lane took up the cry with a grin—"Oad witch! oad witch!" and shook a pitchfork at her.

Dorrily ran to meet her aunt as she tottered up the garden path, the gooseberries dropping between her nerveless fingers as she came. A pitiful revulsion was in her face, and it needed not a word to tell that remembrance had sprung to life at the blow. She fell into Dorrily's arms and burst into a flood of tears.

"O, they say I be a witch! Master Murr'll an' Mrs. Banham! Dorr'ly, I be'n't! 'Tis cruel! I be'n't! God help a poor soul that 's sent the son from her body to fight abroad!"

The girl led her in, with such words of comfort as she could think of. But Sarah Martin seemed to hear none of them; to hear nothing, indeed, but the parting shout of "Oad witch!" from the field beyond the fence, where the Banham skirmishers were retiring in guard of the rescued Jimmy.

"O, 'tis cruel, wicked cruel!" she sobbed, rocking herself in the chair to which Dorrily led her. "An' they did talk o' swimmin' me in t' hoss-pond. 'Tis cruel! They won't swim me naked, will they, Dorry, gal?" And in the passion of the outburst the small cut on the cheek bled afresh.

"Don't take on so, aunt dearie don't," Dorrily entreated, terrified by the violence of the woman's grief. "'Tis no call to take on so! 'Tis only silly

talk! Nobody shall hurt ye, aunt." She wiped the mingled blood and tears from her aunt's cheek, and strove by all means to quiet her. "I'll take care of you, aunt, and there's Jack—remember Jack. 'Tis only a few months he'll be back to us!"

Her son's name seemed to quiet her a little, and perceiving this, Dorrily brought two letters from a shelf. "Look at his letters," she said, "so fond as he be of you. Read them—and remember he'll be home to us soon!" . . .

There was a harsh voice from the lane without, and Dorrily heard, with fresh fears, Mrs. Banham's voice raised in shrill abuse. She left her aunt and shut the door on her.

"Not had punishment enough, han't ye?" Mrs. Banham bawled from the lane. "Not enough to putt the evil tongue on my gal Em, yow mus' make count to catch my innocent-born young child, too!"

"Mrs. Banham, 'tis all a mistake, I tell 'ee!" Dorrily pleaded, from the fence. "My poor aunt wishes no ill to a soul."

"Then why do she tempt a poor little child to take things from her hand, to bewitch him body and soul? No harm, sez she!"

"She did but offer him gooseberries from the bush," Dorrily answered, "seein' him by the gate playin'. She's ill an' broke down with your unkind beliefs."

"Ay, an' good reason! 'Tis for the torment o' such that Master Murr'll do work, an' I joy to know it, after what she did to my children!"

"If only you saw her now, you'd see how cruel you be," Dorrily went on. "'Tis no bodily torment, but 'tis bitter grief to be said ill of. Will you come in, Mrs. Banham, an' see her?"

There was a flash of fierce cunning across Mrs. Banham's face. "So yow try your tricks still, do ye, witches both?" she retorted. "Putt my body over her threshold, an' putt it in her power, eh? Oh, 'tis well I'm not new to such deviltry! Witches both! Yow shall dolour proper for arl, if Master Murr'll can do't! Witches both!"

The flush of anger was on the girl's pale face, and her black eyebrows seemed joined by a knot. "I'll talk no more with such a brawlin' mawther," she said, with sudden wrath in her voice. "Go your way, Martha Banham, an' your ill words fall upon yourself!"

Mrs. Banham was as much in fear as in ire, and something in the angry face looking down on her

lent force to the words. Mrs. Banham said no more, but backed across the lane and turned, nervous fury in her face, and her hands clasped tightly together, with thumbs concealed under the fingers ; as is proper to avert the malice of a witch whose blood you have not drawn.

As Dorrily went back to her aunt, a louder burst of the unwonted noise of the fair up at the village prompted a thought that turned her anger to dread. It was fair day, and Hadleigh was full of Leigh men, boisterous, brutish, and soon to be full of drink. There was no fair day in recollection on which the Leigh men had let the afternoon go peacefully. Of late years a fight between the two villages had been the common outcome, but she remembered the tale of a fair years ago, when they had swum an old man and his wife for witches, with much sport and delight. It was the sort of diversion that they might turn to again with the relish of novelty ; and all the village was calling Sarah Martin a witch. Dorrily had been terrified at the fair-day fights before, but now she prayed for one fervently. And as we have seen, she had her wish, and her aunt was unmolested. But she feared greatly, and she resolved to take her aunt away from the cottage till nightfall, to some place where any party

leaving the village might be seen betimes, and where hiding might be found.

Mrs. Martin was still weeping when she rejoined her, though less violently. "I heared her," she said, "an' she carled us witches both. What shall us do, Dorry gal?"

"'Tis no matter what a silly mawther says," Dorrily answered, forcing a cheerfulness into her voice. "We be true women, and God 'll help us. So we 'll say our prayers together, an' make holiday for to-day, away from the fair an' the noise, an' we 'll take Jack's letters to read on Castle Hill, an' look at the ships."

CHAPTER VII

A STRANGE CLIENT

THE effervescence of fair day had subsided, though plenty was left to talk about in the calmer moods of many months. The probability of the devil manifesting himself in the shape of a blue light, for the befoolment of the coastguard, was discussed, and generally agreed upon; when, in the early dark of an evening, a client came to Cunning Murrell.

He was a big, powerful fellow, and he appeared from the dark of the lane where it sank over the hill. The night was no colder than summer nights had been that season, but the man was muffled heavily, his coat collar up, his cap down over his eyes, and a figured shawl wound about his face till it almost met the cap. As he came to the row of cottages he stood and looked about him sharply. There was nobody else near, and it was past the common bed-time by an hour. There were signs,

however, of dim light both upstairs and down in Murrell's cottage, and the stranger made for the door and rattled the latch gently.

There was a little delay, and then a woman opened the door and looked out. It was Ann Pett, a widowed daughter of Murrell's, who kept house for him; a worn, draggled wisp of a woman of forty.

She peered vaguely into the dark and asked: "Who is 't?"

"Master Murr'll I want," came a gruff voice, made gruffer by the shawl. "Tell him."

The woman hesitated. "I 'll see," she said; and repeated: "Who is 't?"

"Customer, patient—whatever yow call 't," the man answered impatiently. "Tell him 'tis business."

"Well!" the woman said, doubtfully, and paused. And then she shut the door.

The stranger was in doubt, and after a moment's hesitation raised his hand to knock. But the door opened again and the woman invited him in.

In spite of the muffler, the smell of herbs was strong and dry in the stranger's nostrils. Murrell came from the back of the room, sharp of eye and voice. "Get you upstaers, Ann," he commanded,

jerking his thumb backward. "Or stay—get yow out o' door; never mind your bawn't, 'tis a warm enough night." And Ann went submissively as might be.

"Now, friend," said Murrell, "sit yow there, an' give me your cap."

His air of command went ill with his thin voice and small stature, and the big man said gruffly, "I'll keep as I am for the present, meanin' no offence;" and sat in the chair.

Murrell took the rushlight from the mantelpiece and set it on the table, full before the stranger's face; and the stranger instantly reached for the candlestick and put it behind him, at the table-end.

Murrell's keen eyes never left the man's face, muffled as it was, and now in deep shade. But he let the candle stay, and took a seat opposite his client. "Well," he said, "is't med'sun, or what? Be you muffled agin the coad?"

"'Taren't med'sun," the other replied. "'Taren't med'sun, an' 'taren't a coad chill. 'Tis adwice, an' —an'—mayhap summat more. 'Tis well knowed yow do—summat more."

"Well?" Murrell's eyes never winked nor shifted from the shadowy patch that marked the region of the stranger's face.

"Well," the stranger went on awkwardly, "'tis for to say, sich as things lost and stole, buried property, fortunes by the stars, an' that."

Murrell said nothing, and presently the stranger filled the gap by adding "An' matters o' business, pardners an' that."

"Very well," Murrell said thereupon. "What's the property wuth?"

"Property wuth?" the stranger repeated, as one taken by surprise and a shade disconcerted. "Property—wuth. Well, that depends."

"Ah," said Murrell, easily, "depends on where you sell it, p'r'aps. Cost fifty pound to buy?"

"Double that," said the other, rubbing his nose where the muffler tickled it. "Double that, an' a bit more, one way an' another. But wuth more—a lot more, to sell."

"Three or fower hundred pound, mayhap?"

"Ay, all that, an' over. But why d'ye ask?"

"'Tis likely I may need it to go in a geomantic formula," said Murrell, who knew the words were Greek to his client. "An' now what about your pardner?"

"Pardner?" exclaimed the other, with astonishment. "Why, I hevn't said I had a pardner, hev I?"

"'Tis my business to know many things people don't tell me," Murrell answered placidly. "What about your pardner?"

"If yow know," said the visitor doggedly, and with a shade of suspicion, "there's no need o' me to tell ye."

"I ask for what I don't know—yet," the cunning man replied, placidly as before. "If you den't want to tell me ye woo'n't ha' come; an' if your mind's changed you can go now."

There was a few moments' pause, and then the stranger said, with something of sulky fierceness: "I want to know if my pardner be a true man to me."

"Very well." Murrell took a scrap of paper, already written close on one side, from his pocket, reached ink and pen from the mantelpiece, and wrote in a tiny, crabbed hand: *If pardner be faithfull.*

"An' if not," the client went on, "adwice accordin'."

Murrell wrote a line below the other: *If not, what to doe.* Then he asked: "An' where be the property?"

The visitor shuffled uneasily. "O, that's safe enough—put away."

"Hid?"

The man grunted. "Well, yes, 'tis," he admitted.

Murrell added another line: *Propperty hid.* "An' wuth fower hundred pound?" he asked.

"Ay, or more."

Murrell wrote: *Worth above* 400£. He pushed the pen and ink along the table, with another scrap of paper. "There be fower pints," he said, "an' by this curis art we take no more than fower pints at a time. Take you the pen, good friend, an' make you fower lines o' strokes, without counting; a line below a line, an' stop when you please."

The man took the pen in a great brown, unaccustomed fist, and squared his elbows. "Begin here?" he asked.

"Ay, begin a-top. Now a row o' strokes, an' no counting."

With slow labour the stranger traced a row of straggling strokes, and then three more rows below, Murrell watching his face still; though now the keen look had a tinge of something else—perhaps of contempt.

The task ended, Murrell drew the paper toward him, and, rapidly scanning the rows of strokes, placed opposite each a symmetrical group of cyphers. This done, he made more cyphers on the paper he

had first used, and dotted about them with his pen, like a boy with a sum.

"Right witness; left witness; judge. . . . There is much curis information to be read in this figure of geomancy," he said, poring over the paper, but with a sly upward glance. "First, I make it you come from—let 's see—yes, Sheppy, but not a native there."

The man started. But after a moment's pause he replied: "No, I be an Essex man."

"Just that," Murrell went on. "An Essex man lately living in Sheppy. A Leigh man, I do read. An' your pardner's name be"—here he paused, and, with head still bent, shot a glance at the big man as sly as the other, and with an added touch of triumph—"your pardner's name be—Cloyse. Why, that must be Master Sim Cloyse, sarten to say?"

The strange client half rose, but dropped heavily back in the chair, his eyes wide in amaze. "Yow give me that paper," he demanded, extending his arm. "It tell too much!"

"Pooh!" the cunning man answered, keeping the paper under his hand, "'tis read now, arl of it. An' 'tis not my business to tell secrets. Yow be a Leigh man gone to Sheppy, an' your pardner be

Sim Cloyse of Leigh. Speakin' o' Leigh," he went on, discursively, "there were a Sam Gill o' Leigh that went to Sheppy two or three months back. You know nothin' o' him, do ye?"

"Yes"—the man was still a little uneasy, but he answered this question readily enough—"yes, he went on to Portsmouth they do say, an' shipped aboard a summat bound for the West Indies."

"Ah, I wondered. Well, to the matter in hand." Murrell lifted the paper. "Your pardner be Sim Cloyse, as I said, an' you do well to distrust him. You be a Leigh man, lately living in Sheppy, an' *your* name"—he paused, and the man started forward in his chair—"*your* name be Golden Adams!"

"G'lor!" the stranger ejaculated, and flung his cap on the table. He pulled the shawl down from his face, puffed his cheeks and wiped his forehead, revealing the hard, bronzed face of a man of forty. "Damme, Golden Adams *is* my name, an' what hev ye to say to that?"

"Nothen," Murrell answered quietly. "Nothen; I do seem to ha' heard the name at one time, no more."

"Well, an' what more do ye find in that bewitched paper, devil as ye be?"

"Devil?" squeaked Murrell, for his pride was touched. "I'll hev ye know I 'm the devil's master For your hid property I've more to say. 'Haps you'll find a new pardner. We 'll speak of that in the lane. Come!"

He brought his frail and umbrella from a corner, and called permission through the back door for his daughter to return. Golden Adams pushed up his muffler again, put on his cap, and opened the door. But before following him Murrell found another scrap of paper whereon to write the note: *Saml. Gill of Leigh gone from Sheppy now and left Portsmouth by shipp for West Indes.*

He put the note carefully into a shapeless home-made pocket-book, seized his frail and umbrella and his glazed hat, and followed Golden Adams into the outer dark.

CHAPTER VIII

DOUBTS AND A LETTER

DORRILY THORN found little comfort in her aunt's case. Sarah Martin had relapsed into the brooding state of mind that had afflicted her twelve years back or more, after the loss of her husband and her brother. Perhaps her habit now was somewhat less passive than it had been then, for she was beset by a constant fear of her neighbours, exaggerated beyond reason; and the charge she lay under was not a sorrow wrought to its end, but a present and abiding affliction, of a depth only to be felt by a woman brought up to believe witchcraft a very real and hideous crime, in a place where everybody about her shared the conviction. She had aged, too, more than mere time would suggest, since her double bereavement. Indeed, this was the way on and about the marshes, where an inevitable rheumatism weighted the years of those past middle life; and now there

was nothing for her mind but her troubles. So that she wept and brooded, and indulged real and imaginary terrors; being relieved only by intervals of blank forgetfulness. And at night she was restless and wakeful.

The afternoon on Castle Hill in some degree soothed her for the time it lasted, though Dorrily was hard put to it to keep a cheerful face while her eyes and ears were strained toward the village, and her wits were busy devising ways of retreat in case of the approach of folk from the fair.

Jack's letters were read and re-read—short, frank, and ill-spelled, on thin paper, two letters in each envelope, one for his mother and one for Dorrily; and his mother found a childish interest in speculating on each sail as it rose on the distant sea-line, with the counterfeit hope that it might bring his ship on some unforeseen errand home. All the long sunny afternoon they sat undisturbed on the grass of the hilltop, looking out across the great width of green marsh and blue water, and no human creature came in sight nearer than a man, far down on Casey Marsh, who seemed to crawl like an insect, and hopped now and again at a ditch. There was an unfamiliar hum from over the ridge behind—the noise of the fair; and as the

afternoon went the noise grew louder and more varied, though still it was a dull noise enough. Dorrily was a little startled about this time by a fancy of her aunt's that somebody was in the copse just below the castle, watching them. There was no sound, and nobody was to be seen; and as Mrs. Martin admitted that she neither heard nor saw anybody, though she "felt quite sure" that somebody or something was there, Dorrily concluded that it was a mere baseless fancy, and turned eyes and ears again toward Hadleigh.

And so the afternoon grew into evening. The sun went down in blue and gold, and the Nore light burst out in the midst of the darkening sea. The sounds of the fight's last skirmish had come clearly from the nearer meadow whereinto it had straggled, and now the village was comparatively quiet. With the coming of dusk Mrs. Martin grew uneasy, and even Dorrily had no wish to stay longer on Castle Hill; and as they went down toward the lane, Mrs. Martin's apprehensions of something in the copse—something leaving it now, she insisted, and following them—rose tenfold, and hastened their steps, while Dorrily's strained nerves took alarm from each of the tiny night sounds that

the stillness brought to her ear. But they reached the cottage with no greater disquiet, and took their rest.

But the days that succeeded, though easier for Dorrily, since she felt no fear of actual violence once the disorder of the fair was over, saw little change in her aunt. She grew sensitive to the manners and aspect of her neighbours. Mrs. Banham remained sullen, hostile, half-defiant; but the rest displayed a curiously timid deference, an ostentatious anxiety to give no offence, a wish even to propitiate, that might have been gratifying in other circumstances; though as it plainly disguised mere aversion and disgust, and was accompanied by an unmistakable desire to keep at the safest possible distance, its effect was to cause a suppressed torment and irritation which increased with time. And Mrs. Martin's angry looks and frowns askance were popularly taken for plain proofs of witchcraft in themselves.

But her angry looks were for the outer world alone, to which she lifted her bravest face. At home she was pensive and abstracted, and now Dorrily felt indeed that loneliness that she had vaguely apprehended—a loneliness that made her head of the little household, and was loneliness

only in the sense that unaided and uncounselled she must bear the burdens of both.

Almost every morning she went up to the village to meet the postman from Rochford, in hope that there might be a letter from Jack. The journey was fruitless nine times out of ten and more, for, apart from the normal irregularity of mails from a cruising ship, each letter cost threepence in postage, and that for a quarter of an ounce. By a Queen's ship, indeed, half an ounce was brought at the same price, but nothing came and nothing could go at less than threepence. For this reason, too, Dorrily's letters to Jack were few, and for this reason Jack's own letters were short. For a quarter of an ounce is not much, even of thin paper, and when that was divided into two letters, and each was written in Jack's large and laborious hand, the space available was soon covered.

There was a letter a week after the fair. That morning the old postman was brisker than common, or perhaps he carried a lighter load, so that he had reached the post-office, opposite the Castle Inn, ere Dorrily was at the lane corner, and was coming away as she emerged into Hadleigh street. "One for you," he said with a grim nod, jerking his thumb backward.

The postmistress was sorting the little bunch of of letters, nine or ten for Cunning Murrell, three or four for the rest of the village; for Murrell alone had thrice as much correspondence as the remainder of Hadleigh, and this indeed was something below his average delivery. Sickness—of men and cows: bewitchment—of people and churns: and losses—of clothes, watches, crops, and lovers: these afflictions brought him demands and inquiries by letter from all Essex, much of Kent, and even from London, where Essex maidservants had carried his name.

The postmistress hastily put down a folded letter with a vast smear of sealing wax behind it, the gaping end of which had been applied to her eye: for Murrell's letters were the most interesting that came. "Good morning, Miss Thorn," she said sweetly; "there's a letter for you. Here it is. Beautiful weather, isn't it? *Good* morning!" And Dorrily hated her for her civility, for it was the civility of the villagers who feared to anger her aunt. The last letter she had called for that bony woman had flung at her with no sounds but a growl and a sniff.

She thought she had seen Steve Lingood at his smithy door; but, if so, he had gone in. Surely *he*

was not afraid of her? But here was the letter, and the pressing business now was to get into the quiet lane and tear it open. For Jack wrote alternately to Dorrily and his mother, though he sent each a letter in the package; and this was addressed to Dorrily herself. She waited till she had passed Murrell's cottage—for no particular reason, for he was never visible at this time in the morning—and then broke the seal. Her aunt's letter she thrust into her pocket, and sat on a stile—the stile the villagers had crossed in their pursuit of the blue light—to read her own.

Hadleigh street was a large part of a mile long, so that when she had left the post-office she had not perceived Roboshobery Dove in the distance. He had seen her, however, and his keen sea-eyes had detected the letter in her hand. He scented war news, and hurried. So it was that just as Dorrily had mastered the few sentences that were all Jack could find to say, Dove stood before her, telescope under arm.

"Good noos, my dear?" he asked. "I den't come up till I see yow'd a-got to the end. 'Haps there be nothen in it but what aren't for me to see, eh? Hearts an' darts, an' love an'—why I rhymes with love myself, sink me, though I bin

a bacheldor all my life! Aren't the *Phyllis* laid aboard o' nothen? Took no prizes?"

Dorrily took the letter with circumspection, and folded some lines back. "He says he fare well, never better, an'—'We been playin' at bonfires here, at two places nobody can't spell an' not many can say; bigger bonfires than ever they had on Hadleigh common, with ten thousan' barrels o' tar at one place an' eighteen thousan' at the other; not as I counted them, but that's what the captain says, an' a midshipman told me. I went ashore with two hundred others at the first place, an' it was a flare; we burnt eight new craft. The people cut off, though we weren't let to touch them. Now we are to sail to a place called Sweaborg, where they say the Ruskies have got men of war in the harbour. An' so now——'" Dorrily stopped suddenly, doubled the letter up, and concluded shyly, "An' that's all, Master Dove."

"O," Roboshobery grunted, "that's all, is it? Werry good all the same, though I think I read summat about that bonfirin' in the *Chronicle* las' week; 'special as *I* doan't remember neither o' the names too, same as he. Well, my dear, den't I say he was arl right? Den't I say it? Takin' his fun like as in a play; and by this time I

lay he'll be a boardin' o' they men-o'-war like—like—like a cartload o' skyrockets!" And Roboshobery Dove made so vigorous a cut and guard with his telescope that it shot out to full length, and gave the movement an undesigned versimilitude.

Dorrily sighed as she got down from the stile. "Ah," she said, "'tis a long time to wait for him in danger. An' we in trouble enough," she added, half to herself.

The old man looked curiously at her, and then stealthily over his shoulder in the direction of Murrell's cottage. "D'ye know," he said, dropping his voice as though he feared the cunning man might hear, "d'ye know what *he* says?"

"Ay, we know it well enough, an' bitter cruel it be for Cunnin' Murr'll to say it."

Roboshobery Dove nodded, winked, whistled softly, and rubbed a hand over his left ear. "An' yet," he said, "he be woundly clever, sarten to say."

They walked a few steps down the lane. "Question are," Dove went on, musingly, "who they be. We know there must be three—ollis."

"Three what?"

"Three witches in Hadleigh—for ever."

Dorrily curled her lip, "An' who says that?" she asked, though indeed she knew.

"Why," Dove responded, his surprise bringing him half round on the axis of his wooden leg, "he say so hisself; Cunnin' Murr'll; witches in Leigh for a hunder' year, three in Hadleigh for ever; an' nine in Canewdon."

Dorrily knew the saying well enough; but she said, "Then 'tis pity Master Murr'll can't find them all out, cunnin' as they call him, 'stead o' puttin' shame on a good woman."

Roboshobery Dove walked on a little way, eyeing the girl furtively as he went. Then he remarked, "But 'tis sartin he be a woundly clever man—woundly clever. Why, the way he do with warts fair beat a man—looks at 'em, an' they go. An' when Susan Jecks's gown were stole off t' hedge he charmed the thief for to bring it back there quick an' soon—anyhow three mornin's arter. Yes, 'tis sarten he be a woundly clever man."

Dorrily stopped and turned. "Why, Master Dove," she said, "you don't tell me that *you* believe it, too?"

The surprise and pain in her face and voice afflicted the old sailor with some confusion and a touch of shame. "Lord bless ye," he answered, hastily, "I den't say that. No, no. But it's like that Master Murr'll, so deadly clever as he be,

hev got hisself that mixed up with the devil that he doan't ollis know how he do stand. There aren't never been no little thing—no little ill-wishin', nor nothin' as might—as might——"

"Nothing at all, Master Dove," Dorrily interrupted, "nothing but that we're lone women, an' our man be away on the seas fightin' an' offerin' his life for such as mistrust us."

Roboshobery stared for a moment, and then burst out, "Good gal! good gal!" with three slaps of great weight on Dorrily's shoulder. "Good gal! So he be, an' yow be a good mate for him. Don't yow give two thotes to none of 'em, damn 'em! I den't mean more than make an inquiration. Why I fit the French myself—so high! So high!"

For by Roboshobery's system of ratiocination any misgiving as to Mrs. Martin was quieted by the reflection that her son was fighting his country's enemies; was set altogether at rest by the consideration that he himself had once done the same thing; and was swept wholly out of existence by the fact of his inferior stature at the time. So he stumped off cheerfully to take his station at the castle loop-hole, and Dorrily made for home.

Her aunt was nowhere in the cottage nor in the garden, nor could Dorrily see signs of her in any

place visible therefrom, till she descended into the small hoppit across the lane, beyond which lay the castle barn ; and then she saw that the door of the crazy old shed stood open.

In a flash she remembered the day when neighbours had found her aunt there, when she was newly a widow. Dorrily hurried across the hoppit, and there indeed stood her aunt in the barn, with her face turned upward, steadily regarding the beam from which the man had hanged himself forty years back.

"Aunt, here is a letter—from Jack."

The woman made no sign till the words were repeated, and then she merely turned dull eyes on her niece and said : "'Twere here that Masterman hanged himself, after leavin' the black cottage an' sayin' he 'd be back soon. D'you ever hear him now? . . . I wonder if 'tis arl peace with such?"

"Come away, aunt," the girl cried, catching her by the arm. "See? This is a letter from Jack. Come away and read it."

Mrs. Martin drew her hand down over forehead and eyes, and said : "A letter? O ay, from my boy Jack, at the wars. 'Twould seem he be still livin', then."

She followed Dorrily quietly, and presently was spelling out her letter with placid interest.

CHAPTER IX

AMAZEMENT AND A PAIL

LEIGH STRAND—which was the older and more proper name of the High Street—was an amazing lesson in mediæval domestic architecture. Its southern side was built on the seashore, and high water set the back yards and outhouses awash. The conformation of the shore settled, roughly, the contour of the street on this side, with violent modifications occasioned by the fact that no two houses were of the same size, nor had a common line of frontage; the contour of the north side was settled on the principle of complete disagreement with that of the south. The houses pushed their gables in every possible direction, an irresolute crowd; some interiors were attained by perilous ascent of brick steps, worn and broken, others by a precipitous flounder through a low doorway and down a doubtful stair. There was no brick house from end to end, and rain-leaks,

in roofs and elsewhere, were stopped with daubings of pitch, patches of which diversified every red roof in sight; for it would seem to be a principle that everything in Leigh, no matter what, must be repaired, when repair was needed, exactly as if it were a boat. The floor of the street was mere dirt—usually mud—and the upper storeys overshadowed it all day. It was here, near the little square where boats were beached, and where linen fluttered all day from lines stretched over the water, that old Sim Cloyse's house stood, with a narrow alley at its side and a view of a tumbledown shed standing black against the shining sea that lay beyond. It was a larger house than most thereabout, heavily framed and quaintly gabled, and it was one of those the entrance whereof involved descent.

The door opened briskly, and Cunning Murrell appeared in the opening, back foremost. Old Sim Cloyse was showing him out with no waste of ceremony.

"Then you'll make no terms, nor say nothen?" the little man asked.

"Nothen at arl," Cloyse answered stolidly. He was a broad-faced, small-eyed man, with an expression, if it could be called one, of wooden im-

passivity. He stood in his shirt sleeves, stout and clumsy, with one hand in a trousers pocket and the other on the door-handle. "Nothen at arl. An' as for terms, there aren't nothen to make terms about."

Murrell retreated up one step, and said: "Your Sheppy pardner——"

"Pardner in Sheppy?"

"Ay, in Sheppy, though Essex born——"

"Got no pardner nowhere." The door came a little closer.

"Your pardner," Murrell shrilled on persistently, "hev left it with me to deal by way o' lawful spell an' conjuration with arl that use him ill, or do make unfair use of common property, hid or not; an' arl do know my powers for heal or for hurt, whether by——"

"Dunno what yow mean." And the door was shut in Cunning Murrell's face.

He stood for a second, dumbfounded; and then turned up the street, with an angry frown on his face.

He was defied and set at naught. To him it was amazing. In all his world his word was gospel, and people trembled before him. Not a thief in Essex who had stolen linen from a hedge or a watch from a drunken man's pocket but

would hasten to restore his plunder at the threat of Murrell's subtle sciences; not a man or woman with a bewitched or bedevilled child, or cow, or churn, or horse, but was certain of delivery at the hands of Cunning Murrell. His own belief in his miraculous powers was sincere enough, despite the tricks and dodges wherewith he sustained his credit. He was seventh son of a seventh son, which was a sufficient foundation for his confidence, though the acquiescence of his neighbours and the deference they gave him would have been enough to generate it, with no other foundation whatever. In all his previous meddlings among the affairs of the people about him he had never known his threats of thaumaturgic punishment to fail. And now he was stolidly set at naught, put aside, disregarded. His keenest hints, his astutest questions fell helpless before the blockish impenetrability of old Sim Cloyse. It was a new experience for Murrell, and an exasperating. Nevertheless he might have felt in some degree comforted if he could have seen Cloyse's face the instant the door had closed between them. For it burst into a figure of extreme and rather ludicrous alarm, though the emotion was not in the least of a superstitious character.

As Cunning Murrell, however, spite of his subtle learning, was unable to see through the door behind him, he went his way in moody anger, and emerged from Leigh at the Strand end, where a path led up among the rank grasses of the hills toward Hadleigh.

It was early indeed for Murrell to be abroad, and the day was not propitious. He reached home with his temper no whit softened, and he found his belated dinner of bacon and potatoes, cold, greasy, and uninviting. "Ann Pett!" he called—for he always signalised bad temper by giving his daughter her full name by marriage—"Ann Pett! I will not hev this dinner. Rumball hev killed a sheep; go get me a sweetbread."

Ann Pett came in from the back, wiping soapy hands on her apron. Then she held out one, with the remark, "I han't got but a ha'penny."

Murrell's jaw fell. "Nothen but a ha'penny!" he repeated. "Yow den't tell me 'twere runnin' so low." His hand went by instinct to his pocket, though he knew already that nothing was there. Then he flung his hat on the table, and sat down before the greasy bacon. "Get about your washin', woman," he commanded.

Ann Pett vanished, and her father set about his

dinner with what appetite he might. He was exposed to such pecuniary surprises by his habit of disregarding money matters, for he was so much of an artist as to love his trade for itself, and for the power and consideration it won him; so that he would rather meddle and mystify for nothing than not meddle at all. Else he might have been a man of some affluence, as affluence went in Hadleigh. But now it was plain that a little money must be raised somehow, and Cunning Murrell pushed aside his plate at last with a sigh for the philosopher's stone that was beyond the reach of his arts, and a hope for an early client.

He pulled open a drawer, crammed with papers, every one crowded with his tiny crabbed writing, many with straggling figures—horoscopes, sigils, and figures of geomancy; for indeed he worked by all the rules of art as much as by his native acuteness, and here and in his great chest of books and notes was represented the outcome of many years of conscientious study. On some of those papers which were illuminated by no figures, conjurations and prayers were written, all conceived in the most devout spirit of white magic, and all calling down divine wrath on the devil and his agents and all their doings, downsittings and uprisings; and

on others were recorded all and any the most commonplace particulars wherewith he might have become acquainted, of the circumstances, family relations, and matters of private life of every sort, of anybody whatsoever. For all these things there was no order, no index—nothing but their native confusion. Nevertheless it was a matter of habit or instinct with Murrell to put his hand on the note he needed with scarce a second's groping, whether in the great chest or in any of the brimming boxes and drawers in the place.

He pushed aside the heaped papers, and drew from under them a thin book of straggling manuscript, of octavo size, scrawled throughout with uncouth figures of seals, sigils, pentacles, characters, and intelligences; set about thick with faded writing, some his own, some that of the forgotten necromancer whose property the book had been originally. Here were the conjurations and considerations proper to every day and night of the week and every month of the year; and it was his way to keep them in memory by conning them over at odd times. He had put his heavy iron-rimmed goggles on his nose, and turned the yellow page where the sunlight through the little casement fell on it, when there was a timid click at the latch.

Murrell pursued his study, his mouth noiselessly forming the words as he went; for it was his daughter's business to attend the door. But plainly she did not hear, and presently, lifting his eyes, he perceived dimly through the curtains that some short figure, probably a woman's, was receding irresolutely from the step. Now Murrell's most profitable clients among the women were not uncommonly the most timid, and he must not lose this one. So, letting go his dignity, and keeping his reproof of Ann Pett for a more favourable moment, he rose and opened the door.

A young woman in a print gown and white sunbonnet stood without, carrying a baby. A fair though a commonplace young woman, with an anxious and sorrowful face. Murrell's sudden appearance before her, terrible in large goggles, increased her discomposure, and she receded another step, murmuring indistinct apologies.

"Is't for askin' or healin' you're come?" he asked, in the mild tone wherewith he encouraged the diffident. Though, indeed, he knew the girl, as it was his way to know, or to know of, everybody; and he had the means for a good guess at her errand; albeit what he knew did not warrant the hope of great profit.

"Beggin' your pardon, Master Murr'll," the girl said, with an effort, "'tis a question I do want to ask."

"Come yow in, my child, an' I will try my best."

Murrell stood aside to admit her, but still she hesitated. Even more faintly than before she asked: "How much do 'ee charge?"

"'Tis but what you can afford," the cunning man replied. Plainly it was a poor customer, as he had feared. "The skill God hev given me be for rich an' poor, an' they pay by count o' their means, from golden guineas down to—to sixpences." He judged it useless to put the minimum higher.

The girl followed him in, timorous still, and the baby coughed and wailed weakly in the pungent air, laden with the dust of a thousand drying herbs. "Sit you down, now, an' tell me your name an' the question you ask," Murrell said, taking pen and paper.

"Dorcas Brooker," the girl said, and paused.

Murrell wrote the name, and waited.

"'Tis about—about my young man." She looked down at her knees, and her face took on a heavy flush.

"Ah!" Despite himself there was a dry touch in Murrell's voice. He had been pretty certain of

it; and what was coming now he knew well enough.

"I want to know where he be, an' when he will come to me."

"Name?" asked the old man.

"Samuel Gill."

"Where of?"

"Leigh. But he hev been in Sheppy of late, though I get no word of him."

Needless questions both, but Murrell noted the answers carefully, all the same. Then he looked up, and pointed with his pen at the baby. "And that?" he queried.

Her head drooped lower, and she lifted the baby as though to hide her face, till their cheeks touched, and she kissed the child passionately twice or thrice, so that the little voice woke again in a feeble cry.

"His?"

She lifted her face, all tear-stained, for a moment, and wailed, "Ees! ees it be!" and dropping her head again she rocked the child to and fro. "An' O, it be a bitter shame an' sorrow for a poor gal!"

Murrell, who had had more than twenty children of his own, and had lost and forgotten nearly all of them long ago, scratched his head with the

feather end of his pen and turned to the drawer full of papers that he had lately shut. The note he had made from Golden Adams's information as to Gill lay at the top, and it was so new in his memory that there was scarce need to put it among the leaves of the book of conjuration and read it again. Howbeit he did so, and read the note: *Saml. Gill of Leigh gone from Sheppy now and left Portsmouth by shipp for West Indes.*

"Come," Murrell exclaimed as he rose to his feet and slipped the book back in the drawer; "come, wipe eyes, Dorcas Brooker, for yow need them clear to see what I shall show yow."

He went to the back door and called to Ann Pett for a pail of water. For some moments there was the clank of the pail and the creak and thud of a neighbouring pump, and then Ann Pett came, worn and dull as ever, and slow with her burden. Murrell took it, and set it down where the sunlight fell on the rocking water in dancing shapes. Then he took a bottle from a shelf, and poured from it a black liquid, which spread on the surface as oil would, showing a slight iridescence.

"Stand you here," Murrell requested of the girl, who was watching him wistfully; "stand you here an' look down into that."

She bent her head, and Murrell, standing by her, placed a hand on each side of her forehead.

Presently said Murrell: "D' ye see anything?"

"I see the watter," answered the girl innocently.

"Ah—you see the watter, the wide watter, the great, stormy ocean. Look well on it an' tell me what you see."

"No—yes. . . . I think I see a something."

"You see something on the sea, rockin' an' plungin' an' drivin' before the wind. What is it?"

"A ship! Ay, a ship!" the girl cried, with sudden excitement. "I see't! 'Tis a ship, an' he be in it, an' it go drivin', drivin' in the gale!" Her breath came short, and Murrell held her close by the forehead, for she seemed unsteady, though she clasped the baby firmly still.

"O, I see't drivin' an' drivin'," she cried, "an' the waves curlin' over it! An' I see 'tis arl dark before it—no, 'tis a rock, a great black rock! It be on it! O God, 'tis a wreck! O!"

Murrell took his hands from her head and caught her about the waist, letting her back into a chair and steadying the child in her arms. This was a

little more than he had intended; the girl's brain had galloped ahead of him. But perhaps this were the most merciful end for her pitiful romance—short and sharp though it might be.

She did not faint, for that was not the habit of a Leigh girl. But she lay back in the chair, and rolled her head in an agony of tears. Cunning Murrell feared that he must do more than earn his sixpence ere he could be rid of her. He put a bottle of oil of hartshorn to her nose, and he rubbed her forehead. But the fit of grief did not last long. She was not of the sort who could afford to waste time in useless "dolouring." Presently she shifted the baby to her other arm, kissed it, and wiped her eyes with her apron. Then she rose and said simply: "Thank 'ee kindly, Master Murrell. 'Tis a cruel hard blow, but I must a-bear it for the child's sake, for 't hev no other friend, no more than I."

She took a screw of paper from her pocket, and unfolding it, revealed a sixpence and some coppers. She put the sixpence on the table corner, folded the paper over the halfpence, and returned it to her pocket. "I take it kind you chargin' low to poor people," she said, "an' I wish I could pay more. I hope 'tis enough?"

"O ay, 'tis enough," Murrell answered brusquely, picking up the money; "'tis accordin' to means, as I tell 'ee." And he opened the door.

The girl shifted the baby back to her right arm and went out into the lane, no more of her grief visible than was betrayed by a fitful tear or two, overrunning from full eyes as she went.

Cunning Murrell opened his hand and looked at the sixpence, turned his eyes up toward the Dutch clock, and scratched his cheek. Then he looked at the sixpence again, and then at his hat.

"Damn it!" said Cunning Murrell aloud, and almost dropped at the word; for he was a devout man, and scrupulous in his words, as was becoming in one with so exact an acquaintance with their power in spells, charms, conjurations, exorcisms, prayers, and maledictions. He paused with the shock, his gaze still fixed on the hat. Then he reached and snatched it, and ran down the lane after the girl.

He caught her at the stile, just beyond the cottages. "Here!" he said abruptly, thrusting the sixpence into her hand; and instantly hurried back.

He flung his hat on the table, kicked open the back door, and shouted fiercely: "Ann Pett! Be yow goin' to leave this pail o' watter slummuckin'

about here arl day? Will 'ee pitch it away, or wait till I come an' pitch it over 'ee?"

Ann Pett came, submissive and soapy, and carried the pail away. She perceived that her father's ill temper was increasing, though it was no part of her nature to wonder why.

CHAPTER X

PROFITLESS DIPLOMACY

IT was Murrell's habit to take much of his sleep at day, and it was his faculty to take it when opportunity offered. It was now late in the afternoon, and for a little while he debated within himself whether he should lie on his bed above, or doze merely where he sat. But there was more business for him, and he had scarce resolved on a nap in his chair when a heavy step was stayed without, and the door shook with the thump of a fist.

"Come in!" cried Cunning Murrell. And with that the door opened, and Steve Lingood looked in on the little old man, curled in repose amid his cobweb of dusty herbs.

"Good day t' ye, Stephen Lingood," said Murrell, with that dignity that characterised his dealings and conversation with the villagers; though he remembered with some misgiving that he had

not yet paid the smith for the bottle used in the relief of Em Banham from witchcraft.

"Good day, Master Murrell," Lingood answered, in his deliberate tones; "I come on a small matter o' business."

Murrell was not reassured by the expression, but he motioned toward a chair, and Lingood sat, putting his fur cap on his knee.

"'Tis to consult about a matter in your line," he said, "that I should like done, an' will pay for, o' course. Pay for high."

Plainly Steve Lingood felt some embarrassment in opening the matter, and now he paused to pull out from his pocket, rather awkwardly, a small canvas bag, which clinked as he set it on the table. Murrell watched him with much satisfaction; not so much because of the money—though, of course, that was something just now—as because of inward triumph to see the independent young smith, least deferential among the villagers, coming at last to acknowledge his powers, and to beg for his aid.

"'Tis as regards Mrs. Martin," Lingood began, and Murrell's eyes sharpened, though he said nothing.

"As regards Mrs. Martin," Lingood repeated, unmistakably ill at ease; "she fare not very well. . . . Nor her niece. . . ."

Murrell would say nothing to help him out, so presently the smith went on. "She fare bad, more in mind than body, an' when her son is away at the war it come ill to be held up for a witch."

"It come ill, Stephen Lingood, for any woman to make compact with the devil an' use evil sparrits to bring grief on her neighbours."

This was not a proposition that Lingood was prepared to dispute with an adept, and, rubbing his cap along his thigh thoughtfully, he sought to find a way round it. "Perhaps," he said, cautiously, "there might be some mistake."

"Mistake? An' whose mistake? Hev you come here, young Stephen Lingood, to teach me my mistakes in my lawful arts that I was master in before your father was born?"

Lingood felt desperately that he was near wrecking the whole negotiation. The last thing he desired was to anger the cunning man. He hastened to apologise, as well as he was able. "I meant no offence, Master Murr'll," he explained, "still less to doubt your larnin'. 'Twould be beyond me to teach anything out o' my own trade, an' you more than anybody. I did but offer that you might find yourself that some mistake—I den't say mistake o' yours—that some mistake might ha'

crep' in from wrong information or a mistellin' o' the gal's trouble or what not. An' what I come to say is"—here his talk grew firmer—"if there hev been any such mistake, you can find that mistake as nobody else could; an' for the findin' o' that mistake I am willin' to pay high; pay private, o' course, an' say not a word to nobody."

"How much?" There was no asperity in Murrell's voice now, nor in his manner, but a quiet intentness.

Lingood dropped a hand on the canvas bag. "Would five pound satisfy ye?" he asked.

"Five pound for findin' some mistake in the provin' o' Sarah Martin to be a witch—an' givin' it out, arterwards, that she were no witch, I suppose?"

"Ay, just so," responded the smith, beginning to feel successful. "Givin' it out, plain, of course, among the neighbours, so as she an' Dorri—her niece, won't be put to more pain an' shame such as has been."

"Ah! . . . I s'pose, though," said Murrell blandly, "'twould be much the same to you an' Mrs. Martin —*an'* her niece—if I give it out plain among the neighbours that she be no witch, *without* troublin' to find out any mistake first, eh?"

"Ay, that o' course," Lingood replied readily,

glad to see the cunning man rising so well. "You needn't give yourself needless trouble. I 'd ha' said it before, onny I thote you mightn't like it put like that. So long as you give it out an' put 'em straight with the village, that 's enough, an' I 'll pay five pound willin'."

"Steve Lingood," said Cunning Murrell, with an odd grin, "I fear you be a deep fellow."

The smith chuckled quietly and rubbed his fur cap over his knee again. "Ah," he said, "deep as may be, I shoon't like to make a match with 'ee, Master Murr'll. But I 'm right glad we unnerstand one another, an' what we say together"—he lifted the fur cap and crumpled it tight in his hand—"is close an' private, you may depend."

"*Of* course," Murrell assented, still with the odd grin; "close an' private, o' course. That be a very lib'ral offer, Steve Lingood, an' I doubt whether you ben't even more lib'ral than deep. I den't guess you so rich a man, neither."

"Ha! well," the smith laughed, light of heart at his triumph, "you den't guess far wrong, for I 'd be put to it to find arl of another five pound at this minute!"

"That be so, eh? Then so much the more lib'ral, the more amazin' lib'ral. Some persons—thoteful

persons—might say so much the more—the more —eh?"

Murrell's face was thrust forward toward the smith's, and the grin persisted, with cattish fixedness. Lingood felt a vague shock, a sudden rush of blood. So that he must needs gulp before he said: "The more what?"

"The more—the more"—Murrell scratched his chin with his forefinger as he spoke, but the grin relaxed not a shade—"the more—what do the gals an' boys call it?—the more in love!"

Lingood sat back as though from a blow in the face, and his brown cheeks were stricken white. He said nothing, but gulped again, and Murrell clapped hands to knees and laughed indeed, this time with enjoyment. "Come," he said, "I doubt summat o' your deepness after arl, though nothen o' your lib'ral'ty; givin' five pound for love of another man's promised wife!"

Lingood's face regained something of its normal hue, and then grew dark and flushed; he spoke with a dryness of the throat, and a twitch of the mouth. "I den't think to let that be known, Master Murr'll," he said, "though 'twould be a lie if I denied it. 'Tis pain enough, an' not what a man's proud of; an' but for you I'd ha' lived an'

died an' nobody 'd guessed of it. That bein' so I make count with you, as an honest man, to keep my secret, even as I do keep yours. An' to make tight the bargain we made"—his hand trembled now as he took up the canvas bag and groped in it with his fingers—"the five pound be here, an'——"

"The bargain we made!" Cunning Murrell sprang to his feet, hands clenched, and eyes aflame. "Boast of no bargain made with me, Stephen Lingood! I make no bargains with the devil, nor with his messengers! Yow come here with money in your hand to buy my undyin' soul! To bribe me to lie an' blaspheme, that a wicked witch may work her devilish arts among good Christian people with no hindrance! Take up your money, Stephen Lingood, that the devil hev given you to tempt me with, an' much good may it do ye! For I be the devil's master, and no money shall make me his sarvant!"

Lingood was giddy with amaze. What was this? By all his simple lights the negotiations had gone on admirably, with the most neighbourly agreement and success, except for Murrell's divination, by inexplicable means, of its inmost occasion. And now, with all settled and done, and the agreed payment in act of passing . . .!

"Take your money, Stephen Lingood, and do you beware yourself an' guard your own soul 'gainst the witch the devil hev sent to entice you! He do chose his time well—sendin' you with your money on a day when I feel need of it to pay what I owe you!"

Lingood gasped, and somehow got on his feet. "'Tis—'tis beyond me," he said, with slow wonder, "to see you turn that way, Master Murr'll!"

"Ay, much be beyond yow, I make no doubt, deep fellow as you be." The cunning man's excitement vanished as suddenly as it had appeared, and now he turned about as though to busy himself among bottles and jars on the shelf beyond the fireplace. "You hev your answer, Stephen Lingood, and as for what I owe you, this day I cannot pay; though if you will you may take summat for it, or for pledge. Yow can take the clock."

"I den't come to ask for money," Lingood answered heavily. "You can pay when you please, an' I want no pledge. I came to beg a little mercy for two lone women, an' it seems you take it ill. . . . Well, I'm sorry, an' I'll go, an' leave my secret with ye."

Murrell made no answer, but gave his attention

to the bottles and jars; and the smith went his way moodily into the lane.

When he was gone, Murrell called from the back door to his daughter: "There be more o' that bacon left, Ann, ben't there?"

"Yes, near hafe the hock."

"Well, get yow a good double plateful ready, with taters an' bread, as soon as 't be dark."

"To take out with 'ee like las' night?"

"What for doan't you mind, Ann Pett, an' keep your noisy mouth shut about my consarns!" Murrell's temper was fated not to be allowed to soften this day. "Do yow get what I want, an' hoad your tongue." And he shut the door.

The sky was flushing with the sunset, and a shed shut the light from the little back window, so that in the room it already grew dusk; but there was light enough for Murrell to add two more to his heap of notes: *Dor. Brooker left in troubel with babby by Saml. Gill;* and: *Stephn. Lingood do long secret for Dy. Thorn.*

CHAPTER XI

SOUNDS IN THE WIND

HER aunt's sleeplessness added to the concern Dorrily felt for her at this time. More than once, waking in the night, she had found the place vacant beside her, and once her search had only ended in the garden, where she found Jack's mother walking; so that she quickly grew into a habit of light sleep, and was alert to feel Mrs. Martin's absence at any hour of the night.

All unwitting of Lingood's attempt to corrupt Cunning Murrell's integrity on their behalf, they went to bed early as usual that evening. Dorrily may have slept an hour, or perhaps less, when she awoke with a start at a sharp report. She sat up, and saw that her aunt was already awake and half dressed, and was crouching at the little window that looked across the lane to Castle Hill. Ere she could reach her side there came

another loud crack, as of a gun, and Mrs. Martin said, "'Tis shots. Maybe the coastguard." And taking up a shawl she left the room.

Dorrily had learned not to attempt to hinder or dissuade at these times, so she hastened to provide herself with some necessary clothing, and followed. Mrs. Martin went out of the cottage, down into the lane, and straight across to Castle Hill; and when Dorrily emerged she saw her already on the near slope.

There was a south-east wind, a little high for the time of year, and broken cloud, of every degree of thickness and thinness, came steadily across the sky under the three-quarter moon, throwing across marsh and hill sometimes black shadow and sometimes clear white light, with dusky obscurity between. Dorrily overtook her aunt at the shoulder of the mound, where a heap of grey old wall stood, and took her arm. "Aunt Sarah," she said, "I am here. Come with me." And, as the woman turned to look at her, "'Tis I, Dorry," she added. "Let us go back."

"'Tis no night for a run, this," Sarah Martin said, looking across the wide dark water and up at where the moon shone mistily through white cloud. "I wonder what guard John an' Reuben be on?"

Her mind was on the two men dead twelve years since, and Dorrily was wise enough to disturb the poor head as little as possible. "No," she said, "'tis no night for a run with a moon like that, an' if there be no run all guards are alike; they 'll take no harm."

"But I heard shots, I tell 'ee. Dorry, I hope they ben't on the watter!"

"'Tis the same to them, watter or land," the girl answered, with an odd after-thought of the truth in the words. "'Tis a still night on watter, as you may see."

"But I heard shots. Hark!"

Both listened. The wind was steady from over water and marsh, and carried sound far, even while it confused it. From Sea Reach there came no noise but the hum of the wind itself; but lower on the hill or by the marsh edge there was the faintest regular sound, sometimes almost inaudible, but regular still. The two women turned ear to the wind and Dorrily watched her aunt's eyes anxiously.

"Hear!" Mrs. Martin said, pointing down hill. "'Tis horses—bein' led!"

"Strayed on the marsh, Aunt Sarah, an' some one bringing them in, that 's all."

For a moment they listened, and it seemed that the sound receded. Then a sudden noise from below the mound made them turn.

A man went running pell mell up the lane, a stable lantern tumbling and swinging from one hand. He looked neither to right nor to left, but scampered madly, the lantern banging and clanking from thigh to forearm. It would seem to be a bolt of sheer terror, though at what it were hard to say, save for the ghostly reputation of the spot; for nobody pursued him. And there was barely time to see that he wore a smock frock, and had the appearance of a farm hand, ere he vanished at the bend.

Again Dorrily urged return, this time with more persuasion. "'Tis no run," she argued, "else the guard would burn lights, an' we should see an' hear all from here. You're losin' your rest an' 'haps takin' a chill for nothen. That's nothen but a great lout runnin' from his shadow, an' 'tis all quiet now. Come back, do 'ee."

Her aunt sighed, and turned with her down the path. "Ah," she said, "'tis anxious waitin' for them a-nights."

They were well over the crest when a dark figure rose out of a clump of bush and broken masonry

twenty yards from where they had stood. It was a man, a tall man, whose back was so toward what light there was that no witness could have sworn to him as Golden Adams. He peered over the shoulder of the mound after the women, and satisfied that they were gone, crept along the almost obliterated line of the curtain wall toward the south tower.

The cottage door was closed again, quiet and dark. The shattered towers beyond the mound frowned and paled by turns, as the clouds governed the moonlight, and Cunning Murrell, nearing the castle stealthily by the meadows above the lane, heard no more than the rustling of the leaves, nor added to it the least sound himself.

CHAPTER XII

SHADOWS ON THE HILL

AS Lingood passed the Castle Inn, on his way from Murrell's, he could hear laughter and talk in the parlour, where candles were being lighted. But he was in no mood to join the company, and so he kept his way to the smithy.

Prentice was in the parlour, however, and Banham and Dan Fisk. Also Abel Pennyfather, a small farmer, though a large and wide person; and two or three more, including the colourless man, burdened with the never-completed story of the balloon that fell in Barling in eighteen hundred and twenty-eight.

"Tarkin' o' Barl'n'," said Abel Pennyfather, cutting short the balloon man just before he got to the date, "just look 'ee here at this stick. See't? Now I lay a penny yow don't know, none on ye, what that stick is, nor where it kim from?"

Most of them did, having heard the story before,

but nobody ventured to say so except the injured balloon man, who, stung to rebellion against Pennyfather's big voice and loud manner, began: "Why, ees, sarten to say, that onny be——"

"That stick," roared Pennyfather, banging it on the flat of the table—"that stick be a thistle. Nothen but a common rank oad thistle. An' I ha' had that stick twelve year. An' I lay a penny you dunno where it kim from. Well, when oad Wilker had Burton's farm, yow never see sich a farm in arl your born days; never. Darty fiel's! La! I 'd think so. Nobody never knowed what a darty fiel' was that hent seen oad Bob Wilker's. Yow coon't tell whether 'twere beans or carlock he were growin'—'cept 'twere nigh arl carlock. Carlock an' dog grass *an'* thistles! Lud! Why folk kim miles to see 't, 'twere such a sight. Well, I looks over into a wheat fiel' one day, an' there 'tarl were; such a foison o' thistles an' carlock an' muck as yow never see—thistles high as a man, very nigh. So, sez I, I 'll just take a look over that fiel', I sez, and find the true champion among they thistles. So I looks an' I looks, but dang 'tarl they be arl so woundly big I coon't make ch'ice. But, sez I, I 'll take away one with me for cur'os'ty. So I cuts it close down, an' a deadly

fine bit o' timber 'twere. Why, sez I, that 'ud make a good warlkin' stick! An' a warlkin' stick I made it! Ha! ha!"

"'Tis a wonnerful stick," remarked the docile Banham, examining it as though it were not as familiar in his eyes as Abel Pennyfather himself. "A wonnerful stick, sarten to say. An' nothen but a rank oad thistle, sez you! Well, well."

"The games I had with that stick!" Abel pursued, with a chuckle. "Drove poor oad Bob Wilker hafe shanny. 'Good mornin', Master Wilker,' sez I. 'How d' ye like my warlkin' stick? Fine bit o' timber, ben't it? Much obliged t' ye for it, Master Wilker. Got it out o' a wheat fiel' o' yourn, an' left plenty more behine. Why doan't you grow warlkin' sticks for reg'lar crop?' Lord! that mad he were!"

"He were a rum 'un, oad Wilker," Prentice said soberly, refilling his pipe. "Farmed slovenly an' farmed mean, an' thote to make it pay by bein' meaner. Remember the fanteeg with the gleaners?"

"Woon't hev 'em, would he?"

"Got a-hossback, with a rope to the saddle, him an' his hossman, both a-hossback, one each end o' the rope. Gallopped over a fiel', so 's to loop up arl

the gleaners an' sweep 'em away. Gleaners got on a bank an' broke his ja' with a brickbat. Rope caught a woman, hulled her over an' putt out her shoulder, and she summonsed him an' made him pay. He went in to tie up his ja', an' the gleaners they went off with fower traves o' wheat. Cost him three years' gleanin's, that did.'

"Well," Pennyfather proclaimed, "he den't know how to farm, he den't. Farmin' mean doan't do—not in Essex. Now look at *me*. I 'll just tell 'ee. When a man comes——"

There was a wrenching, first one way and then the other, at the door handle, ere the door opened, and a red, vacant face appeared above a dirty smock frock and below a very bad hat. "Master Pennyfaa'?" said the face interrogatively: for Abel was behind the door.

"Ees?" Pennyfather turned about in his chair and faced the new-comer. "What is't now, Jarge Crick?"

"They cows be driv' in by the new boy, and Missis she says there be but fowerteen in cow'us."

"Fowerteen? Where be t' other then?"

"Missus say it be oad Molly."

"*Where* be 't, joulterhead?"

"She maake count it strayed down on to marshes. Boy went and found gate oppen."

"An' why den't he go an' find her?" Abel demanded with rising wrath.

"'Tis dark, an' he be feared."

"Feared! Feared o' what? Why den't ye go yerself, 'stead o' comin' jahin' here? Yow ben't feared, too, be yow?"

"Yow be mindful of the White Lady down by the castle, Jarge," put in Dan Fisk, with a malicious squint. "Ay, and the Black Man, too, and the witches that do live thereby."

"'Haps oad Molly won't take no ill a warm night, master," Jarge hinted uneasily, fidgeting with the door-knob, "an' 'tis hard to find a beast in the dark."

"Take no ill! Why she'll go a-eatin' that oad cowbane arl night an' pizen herself! They squelchy places be full of it. Doan't 'ee be a fool, Jarge Crick. Take yow a lantern, an' go arter her, quick an' sharp. Go on!"

Jarge Crick, with no extravagant signs of enthusiasm, slowly withdrew, and pulled the door behind him.

"It do beat me," commented Abel Pennyfather, when he was gone, "to see the timmersome fancies o' folk hereabout. Ghosts, an' witches, an' White Ladies, an' Black Men, an' what not, an' everybody

feared to go nigh the castle arter dark, an' Cunnin' Murr'll there makin' his livin' of it."

Banham shuffled uneasily, and Prentice said, "Cunnin' Murr'll 's a knowledgable man, howsomedever."

"An' I do seem to remember," remarked Dan Fisk abstractedly, "I do seem to remember somebody carlin' in Cunnin' Murr'll to a sick cow—though whether 'twere oad Molly or one o' the oathers I dunno."

"Cow doctorin's one thing," retorted Abel, reddening and puffing his cheeks, "an' ghosts an' goblins is anoather. I doan't deny as Murr'll be a scholard, an' I 've had him to cure cows an' pigs, an' I 'd hev him agin; an' I 'd hev him for a human ague or what not. But ghosts an' witches —bah! I doan't give that for arl of 'em!" And he snapped his fingers.

"Murr'll be a wonnerful man with warts," said Prentice. "Looks at 'em an' they be gone in the mornin'. Sometimes doan't even look at 'em."

"Ah!" said another, "an' things stole! 'Tis known how gifted he be with they. Remember Dicky Wicks, as went to sleep in the tap-room at the Crown an' got his puss stole? Well there were twelve shillin' in the puss, an' he went to

Murr'll, an' Murr'll he took it down 'zact, when he went in an' when he woke up, an' who were there, and what the puss were like, an' what not. So, sez Murr'll, 'If I get it back for yow 'ool yow promise not to persecute——'"

"Prosecute," Prentice hinted.

"So I said—persecute. 'If I get it back for yow,' sez Murr'll, 'ool yow promise not to persecute, supposin' yow larn who be the thief?' So Dicky Wicks promised, an' sez Murr'll, 'Putt a pot or a mug on your doorstep overnight, an' look in it in the mornin'.' So Dicky Wicks putts out the mug, an' in the mornin' he comes an' looks at it, an' there be nothen there——"

"Ha! ha!" roared Abel Pennyfather. "Might ha' 'spected as much. Nothen there!"

"Nothen there the *fust* mornin', as I said. But sez Murr'll, 'Putt it out agin,' an' he did; an' nex' mornin' there be the puss in the mug complete, just as 'twere lost, with the twelve shillin' in it, the very same coins as were there when he lost it—leas'ways he coon't swear to 'em, but he thote most on 'em were."

"Ay, 'tis wonderful doin's, sarten to say," Banham said musingly, with a slow shake of the head. "An' him with such a mort o' trades, too.

Readin' arl sort o' things—the stars, an' Greek, an' moles an' what not, an' herbs and cures, an' surveyin'."

"Ah, an' wonnerful visions o' prophecy in a pail, they do say. Why, that Mrs. Mead as is now, when her fust husban' went away an' weren't heard of ever agin, she den't know whether she might marry agin lawful or not, till she went to Cunnin' Murr'll an' looked in the pail o' watter an' there see a funeral a-goin' into a chu'chyard. Den't know what to do, not till then, she den't."

"'Tis no denyin' he be a man o' great powers," said Prentice, with judicial calm.

"An' how he go about at night! He've been seen at sputs miles apart at the same time, often. He go out most o' dark nights, when oather folk be timmersome, an' he go anywhere—white ladies or sparrits give *him* no fear."

Abel Pennyfather snorted. "Give *him* no fear!" he repeated scornfully. "An' who do fear 'em, eh? Who do fear 'em?"

"Some do, sarten to say," Banham replied mildly. "'Tis not given to arl folk to meet such with galliant defiance like yourn, Master Pennyfather."

"Pooh, pooh!" said Abel Pennyfather.

There was a gallop and a bounce outside, and something struck the door with a clatter. Once more it opened, and Jarge Crick, his face red no longer, but dirty white, like putty, stood and gasped for breath, an extinguished horn lantern hanging from one finger and smelling horribly.

"Why, Jarge!" cried Dan Fisk. "Been a-ghost seein'? What ha' yow done with oad Molly?"

"Marshes—castle—ghostes—I see 'em—witches—arl on 'em—G'Lor!" Jarge Crick laid hold of a chair-back and panted afresh, his eyes rolling wildly.

"What ha' ye seen, ye great fool?" Pennyfather demanded angrily. "Get your breath an' tell plain. Sit down, then. Where's the cow?"

Jarge Crick fell into the chair he had been leaning on, staring and panting still, for he had run half a mile up hill at his hardest.

"Where's the cow?" asked Abel Pennyfather again, with increasing wrath.

Jarge shook his head, and glanced nervously over his shoulder. "Han't—sin her," he said. "Arl marshes — an' Castle Hill — devil-rid an' harnted!"

"Harnted be gormed! What's gastered ye?"

"I see the Black Man, an' witches, an' ghostes, an' hosses like the Book o' Revelations!"

Banham, whose eyes and mouth had remained steadily open since Jarge came in, here murmured: "Yow doan't say 't! Ghostes an' hosses like Revelations!"

"When I'd a-got down jist over the marsh," Jarge Crick went on, growing less breathless and more coherent, "I went by the cliff-side a-sayin' over prayers to meself, as is fit for times o' great per'l, an' I see frightful shadders movin' on Castle Hill."

"'Tis cloudy an' moonlight by turns," said Pennyfather testily, "'an shadders be nat'ral."

"An' the nearer I kim the more I heared sighs an' moans an' dolourin' noises 'pon the hillside."

"'Tis a steady wind from the sea, an' yow hear it in the trees an' copses."

"But I hearted up strong, for I see a beast on the hill as the moon kim out, an' even a cow be comp'ny to a man in sich deadly places; an' I went forrard in prayer an' tremblin'. But the moon went in agin, an' no beast could I see, though I were a-nigh where it ote to be. An' then there kim a mortal loud bang, an' I drops down to hidin' in a bush."

Abel Pennyfather offered no explanation of the bang, and the rest only gaped and listened.

"Scace was one bang but there kim anoather,

an' I dussen't look up. But when no oather bang den't come I hearted an' peeped, an' cuther! There goed a ghostly pale hoss, an' there goed a black hoss an' more down the hill, arl shadder an' sparrit an' breathin' fire and brimstone, an' black shadders o' creeping ghostes at their halters. I coon't stand nor run—not nohow. An' I looked up the hill, an' there I see the Black Man, true as print. A gashly great black tarl man, with eyes o' flamin' fire, stannin' by the tower, an' gazin' terr'ble down on the shadders an' sparrits, till I a'mos' swounded. An' when I looked agin he were gone—gone like smoke. I crarled round behin' the bushes till I kim near by the lane end, an' then there were v'ices —v'ices with words I coon't unnerstand, nor no Christen man either, up on the hill. So I looks agen an' 'twere two women right atop—stretching out their hands over the gashly place an' sayin' their words; an' I'll swear it solemn, 'pon Bible oath, for once I see 'em clear, 'twere Mrs. Mart'n, the witch, an' the gal her niece!"

Wide eyes and wide mouths moved not, but from the latter there was an escape of breath like wind from a noisy bellows, and Banham gurgled hoarsely: "Witches' meet'n', sarten!"

"An' with that I gets my senses back, an' being

at the lane end I 'oon't look no moer, but let go arl an' runned."

"Pity yow den't get your senses back 'fore yow started out," sneered Abel Pennyfather. "Yow go out arter my cow, an' yow come back with a silly mawther's yarn like that, an' leave the cow to pizen herself an' get lost! Go yow back, Jarge Crick, an' find my cow. Go on!"

"Go back!" ejaculated Jarge, his returning colour checking at the thought. "Not me!"

"I tell yow to 'bey my orders!" pursued his master, with an angry thump on the table. "Go an' bring in that cow, an' let 's hear no more o' yar gammick, else find anoather place!"

Jarge rose to his feet, but shook his head steadily. "Not me, master," he said. "I 've sin it an' yow han't. I 'd sooner a-lose me place fowerty times. Yow go an' fetch her yourself, Master Pennyfaa', if yow ben't afeared. I am." And Jarge Crick, sidling and shaking his head, carried his tale and his lantern out into the tap-room.

For a few minutes there was silence, save for certain grunts and snorts of disgust from Abel Pennyfather, and then Dan Fisk said, with his odd squint: "Hedn' yow better see about oad Molly 'fore she gets strayed too fur?"

"Dang the cow, no. She woan't take no harm."

"But there be a mort o' cowbane in the squelchy places, Master Pennyfather."

"Cowbane be danged. If she'll take it I count she's took it by this time, an' anyhow yow can't see a cow on a marsh on a night like this, an'—but there—none of ye be drinkin'! Doan't sit with empty pots, neighbours! What 'll ye arl take?"

CHAPTER XIII

A TALE OF TUBS

WHEN Mr. Cloyse's stolid face told a tale of alarm to the scarce more wooden door that shut out Cunning Murrell, there was good reason. For in truth he realised that this inconvenient meddler had surprised an important business secret. Suddenly confronted with the fact at the interview, he had no choice but to defend himself, for the time at least, by the mask of total ignorance, indifference, and denial that so well became him. But useful as this defence was, and effectual as it had proved in staving off Murrell's interference for the moment, it had its faults. For one, he could make no fishing inquiries without marring its effect. So that Murrell had gone off without betraying in any way the extent of his real knowledge save in one particular, and that misleading. For Cloyse judged from the answer to the one question he ventured, that his "partner" must be gone back to Sheppy,

as he had already supposed; and this was a mistake.

Now the facts stood thus. Mr. Simon Cloyse, ever alert to add another hundred pounds, or even a hundred pence, to the hoard of his lifetime of astute and various traffic, had seen the opportunity for such a stroke of business as had suggested itself to Prentice, and had seen it long before the notion had occurred to that easy-going oldster himself; and when, after the adventure of the blue light on Southchurch cliffs, Dove and Prentice had exchanged winks and hints as to his finger being in the affair, they made the shrewdest guess of their lives. Albeit they kept their surmise to themselves, and not a soul in Leigh suspected, for the very natural reason that comparison of notes had made it certain that not a man along the coast, from Bemfleet to Shoebury, had been "out" that night; and goods could not be run without a crew. But as a matter of fact Sim Cloyse had taken the added precaution to employ a Kentish crew; or, rather, Golden Adams had employed the Kentish crew on Cloyse's stipulation. There was every advantage in the arrangement; for Golden Adams was an old hand, and though he was now living in Sheppy, the Essex coast was familiar to him foot

by foot. And both he and his crew coming from Kent there would be no suspicious fore-moves on the Essex side to set the coastguard alert, nor any after-gossip in the neighbourhood to betray the operation.

Golden Adams was not only the most likely man for the job, but there was a certain matter of ancient debt between them, and Sim Cloyse, with native sagacity, had little doubt that by observing a wise reticence as to this matter until the stroke of business was successfully completed, and then bringing it into the final balancing of accounts, he would be able to keep the profits of the venture where he preferred them to be—in his own pocket.

With these views he settled his partnership with Golden Adams in this wise: Cloyse was to supply capital and pay expenses; Adams was to find the crew and do the work; and the resulting profits were to be divided equally. Nothing could seem fairer on the face of it, as is the fashion of half-profit agreements of many sorts; but in this, as in some of the others, the capitalist was aware of certain private expedients whereby his own share might be augmented without notice to the other side, and this wholly independent of the debt aforementioned. For the selling would be in his hands,

and the selling would be a transaction of secrecy; and the expenses, after the landing of the cargo, could be put at anything he pleased.

The run was to be an uncommon one in another respect. It was neither to be a direct run, in which the cargo would be taken on shore and carried instantly inland, nor were the goods to be sunk off shore, there to await a timely opportunity of removal. They were to be landed and carried just so far as a convenient hiding-place, and no farther; and there they were to lie for a week or two, till the affair—if there had been rumour—had blown over, and then Cloyse would provide means for carrying them inland. Cloyse and his son prepared the hiding-place with much secrecy, by the easy process of loosening a number of stones that blocked the fore part of one of the cellar-chambers of Hadleigh Castle. The place was perfect for its purpose. The cargo could be carried there direct from an easy landing-place without traversing a yard of public road or passing any habitation; the entrance to the cell once reblocked, the "stuff" might remain for any length of time undisturbed; and the spot was close by the end of the quiet narrow lane leading up to Hadleigh, by which way the final removal would be made.

Everything went very well on the night after Hadleigh Fair. The trick to draw off the coast-guard succeeded completely, and a hundred tubs were run across Casey Marsh and safely packed away long ere the patrols had begun to return. But on the very next day Golden Adams began to be a nuisance. He was in low water, it seemed, and he wanted an advance on account of his share of the profits. It was in vain that Cloyse pointed out that there were no profits as yet, nor could be till the tubs were inland, and sold. Golden Adams, who had a blunt way of saying disagreeable things, pointed out that by that time Cloyse would be in a position to repudiate his liability altogether; and he insisted on a payment on account as guarantee of faith. To this Cloyse opposed the objection that he had not a penny of ready money in the world, having ventured it all in the cargo; a statement which Adams made no bones of calling a lie.

So the thing stood at deadlock. It appeared to Cloyse that all the advantages were on his side, since it would be out of the question for Adams to dispose of any of the secreted liquor on his own account; for that were a transaction needing special knowledge and connections, which Adams had no acquaintance with; and moreover, some advance of

money would be needed for transport and reducing —for the spirit was far above proof. So that old Sim Cloyse bore his partner's angry departure with serenity, quiet in his resolve to wait his own convenience, dispose of the goods at his own opportunity, and deal with the proceeds at his own discretion.

He saw no more of Adams for a day or two, and concluded that he had gone home; and his equanimity endured till Murrell arrived to negotiate on Adams's behalf. At this it received a great shock. For here was Murrell in possession of the secret—a man as clever as himself, in another way—and the fact suggested unpleasant possibilities. What should prevent Murrell, failing to make an arrangement, from giving information to the revenue officers, and pocketing a share of the prize-money for himself? He was in no way implicated in the run, and stood to make most by revealing it; and in old Sim Cloyse's simple system of ethics what a man made most by was what a man would do. More, such a catastrophe would mean worse than the mere loss of the "stuff," bad as that would be; it would mean gaol, and a fine whose magnitude sent one hot and cold to think of—that is, if Murrell's evidence could connect one

with the matter. Old Sim Cloyse fell into a great disquietude.

On the other hand, he had no idea of how far Murrell's information went. Golden Adams, in consulting him, had possibly used very general terms, without distinctly specifying what the goods were, or where they lay. Murrell's use of the words "hidden property"—he had never once particularised further—gave encouragement to this hope, though Cloyse was not persuaded; for he could not conceive a conversation between Golden Adams and Cunning Murrell which should not leave the wizard in possession of all that Adams had to let out. So that, on the whole, Sim Cloyse's disquietude increased rather than diminished with reflection.

Plainly something must be done, and that quickly. If Murrell should turn informer it would probably be soon, lest the tubs were shifted. Obviously the proper move was to shift them instantly—that night, if possible. But no arrangements had been made, no men were ready, and nobody was prepared to receive them. Cloyse decided to house the tubs quietly himself, and with no help but that of his son—his son and his horses, to be exact. He knew he was able to lay his hands on three, two that he had bought, with the design of selling them

again, from Hayes, who ran the shrimp-cart to London, and an old white vanner. He considered that it would be no difficult thing to lead the three silently out of Leigh at nightfall, over the marsh, and up the slope to the castle. The tubs were ready slung for carrying, and he expected that the broad backs of the horses could, with a little contrivance, be made to carry so many that no more than three journeys, or at most four, would be necessary. In his old house in Leigh Strand and the outbuildings attached to it there was room and to spare for the tubs twice over; and though no doubt there was danger in having the "stuff" on one's premises, it certainly seemed to be the less, by far, of the two risks that faced him.

Accordingly the horses were made ready, and at the proper time of dark, when the Leigh houses, standing all ways, seemed to hump their high shoulders and confer together, black and frowning, plotting to fall murderously on the next passenger along the narrow way beneath, old Sim Cloyse and young Sim his son went out silently over the little foothills and the marsh, leading their horses. The night was not so dark as Cloyse would have preferred had the circumstances admitted of choice; indeed, at times the moonlight flung down brightly

on everything. But for the most of the time the scurrying clouds spread a mottle of moving shadow that was near as effectual a screen as solid darkness itself, and the wind lay so as to carry away from Leigh and any possible watchers the faint sound made by horses' feet in the soft ground and thick herbage.

For near three-quarters of an hour they went in silence, picking their way carefully, because of holes and ditches. For most of the latter part of the journey the towers of the castle were fitfully visible, at times springing suddenly as it were into being, pale and ghostly on the hilltop, and vanishing as quickly under the shade of the next cloud.

There was a gate in a hedge a hundred and fifty yards from the nearest corner of the castle, and having opened it with noiseless care, young Cloyse stayed there with the horses, while his father went forward to observe.

There was no sound but the hum of the wind, and nothing moved that the wind did not stir, save the unresting tide of shadows. Cloyse crept forward silently, hidden by shade, bush, and fallen masonry, till he stood in a narrow passage lying along the face of the foundations, between them and a row of bushes.

The hole was closed still, and it was plain that the stones piled to block it had not been disturbed. Cloyse crept back as silently as he had come, and beckoned to young Sim.

They led the horses up, and the older man, taking a candle-end from his pocket, was indicating by gestures where the animals could best be tethered, when young Sim, with a start, pointed up to the wall-foot just above them. Cloyse had scarce time to turn when a blinding flash met him; and with a crash in his ears and a stinging pang in an arm, he realised that he had been fired at, and hit.

The horses started and tugged at their halters, and it was more by instinct than because of reflection that young Sim crouched and began to hurry downhill with two of them; and his father, his wound notwithstanding, seized the other horse and followed, crouching also, taking shelter of the animal and making for the bushes.

He had gone twenty yards, perhaps, when there came another shot, and broke a thorn bush. There was no pursuit, however; and father and son presently found themselves beyond the gate and in comparative safety, with a little relief to qualify a great deal of terror and surprise. The wound

bled a good deal, and was painful, but it was little more than a deep graze, ploughing the outer surface of the upper arm scarce a quarter of an inch at the deepest. A tied handkerchief restrained the bleeding for a time, and with many tremors and much floundering the two reached home at last.

Old Sim Cloyse was disquieted before his journey, but he quaked after it. For he made no doubt that he had been fired at by a revenue man, and he lay the night in hourly expectation of a party to arrest him. But the morning came and found him safe, and it went, and left him undisturbed. With the passing hours reflection got the better of his fears, and he began to doubt if his plan had been frustrated by the coastguard after all. Otherwise why was there no pursuit? And why was he still left unmolested? Young Sim had perceived but a single dark figure, and had scarce pointed at it when the shot was fired. True there were two shots, but they might easily have been fired by one man with a pair of pistols. And if no Queen's men were concerned that one man could scarce be other than Golden Adams. Adams was a dangerous sort of fellow, and quite likely to have mounted guard over the tubs with a pair of pistols,

resolved to prevent any attempt at removing them till his demands were satisfied.

Now that the notion had occurred to him, Cloyse wondered that he had not thought of it before, nor laid his plans in view of the possibility. But at present he was by no means sure, after all, that his assailant was not a coastguardsman, as he had at first supposed. So he sent young Sim out to spy about Leigh for an hour.

Young Sim's observations were reassuring. The coastguard were about their customary duties in the ordinary sleepy course; the women hung out their linen and clinked about the muddy Strand in pattens, and quarrelled at the pump; the men waited the tide, mended their nets, smoked their pipes, and lounged about the Smack Inn; and in all Leigh there was not a new thing to hear or to talk about save only the chances of a change of wind. Plainly there had been no disturbance of the coastguard. If there had been anything like a seizure during the night—were it merely of one square bottle of Dutch gin—nobody could have walked the length of Leigh Strand without hearing of it a dozen times. The linen would still lie within, and the quarrel at the pump would be held over till to-morrow, or even postponed for a week,

while the business was discussed at length, at large, and again; and the substitute coastguard would have been in a riot of distraction.

Old Sim Cloyse was relieved; but with his spirits his natural spite rose also, and he was more than ever obstinately resolved to seize the tubs at any cost, were it only to damnify Golden Adams. But meantime young Sim extended his reconnaissance to Hadleigh, by the road, and undertook, though with no great readiness, to take a peep at the castle by daylight, and if possible to ascertain if anything were yet removed.

He had a drink at the Castle Inn, and another at the Crown. At the Crown Abel Pennyfather was talking of crops to the landlord, nobody else being there to hear; but at the Castle Dan Fisk was reciting, with facetious embellishment, the story of Abel Pennyfather's cow, and the terrific adventures of Jarge Crick. And in the tap-room Jarge Crick himself, out of a job for the time, but in no lack of eleemosynary threepenny from a constant succession of gaping inquirers, was repeating his last night's experiences again and again, having already arrived, by natural accretion and the concatenation of pints, at a tale of hundreds of phantom winged horses, of all known and un-

known colours, bestridden by goblins and skeletons, belching lightnings and thunderbolts about the hill, whereon Black Men, White Ladies, and the Devil himself disported at large under the shadows of a flying cohort of witches on broomsticks, directed by Mrs. Martin and her niece Dorrily Thorn.

But there was no word anywhere of slung tubs, no talk of the coastguard, no hint of any but supernatural disturbance of last night's quiet on the marshes. In that respect young Sim took comfort; but there was matter for more misgiving in Jarge Crick's tale. Through all its multiplication of maze and muddle it was plain to infer that Castle Hill and the marshes had not been so wholly void of by-chance observers as they had seemed.

Young Sim Cloyse took to the fields east of the lane, so as to approach the castle without passing within hail of Banham's. He was a careful youth, as became his ancestry, and as his sly-heavy face, a smoother copy of his father's, gave hint; but he was a youth notwithstanding, and his divagations with Mag Banham had led him farther than he meant. For indeed they had begun less from idle fancy—though that had its part—than from pique at his repulse by Dorrily Thorn, and from the vanity of an obstinate nature. And now he found

himself so far entangled that he took refuge in caution and avoidance.

The black cottage came in view at one point of his walk, and he was in some degree tempted to go aside on chance of meeting Dorrily; for the girl was not a fool, and plainly she must see the superior attractions of his circumstances and his expectations from his father, over the poverty of a common seaman; to say nothing of personal comparison, wherein his dense complacency would admit of no disadvantage. But for the moment there was more pressing business, and he went on by a circuitous path, which led him to the eastern side of the castle.

He had seen nobody since he had left Hadleigh, and he could neither see anybody now nor hear a sound of human origin. He took his way softly among bushes up such a part of the hill as should lead him unseen to a view of the place of storage.

It seemed to be still undisturbed. He crept a little closer. It *was* undisturbed, without a doubt; the stones still blocked the opening, and there was no sign that one had been shifted. He listened again, and peered about him. The stillness was such that here, bending low near the ground, he could distinctly hear the mumble of the grazing of

a score of sheep on the marsh by the hill-foot. He grew so confident that he rose boldly and approached the broken masonry: and then on a sudden was near stricken to his knees by a loud voice just above him.

"Ho-ho!" sang the voice. "Yow nigh made me drop my glass, I jumped so!"

And the face of Roboshobery Dove, wide and brown, and crowned as with a halo by the shiny hat, looked down from his loop-hole.

Young Sim gathered his wits together as well as he might, and made an indistinct answer, turning from the piled stones and affecting intense interest in the view toward Leigh.

"I den't hear yow comin'—not a sound," Dove went on; "been watchin' so close for prizes goin' to Chatham. But I han't seen one now for near a week."

"No?" answered young Sim, with an uneasy effort at airiness—a thing beyond his nature at any time—"Well—I—I mus' be gettin' on."

And he went lumbering down toward the copse and the gate in the way he had led the horses the night before; the plain consternation and perplexity on his face making an odd contrast with the laboured burlesque of careless frolic in his swinging

arms and legs, whereby he strove to impart to his back view an aspect of buoyant thoughtlessness and jaunty ease.

Roboshobery Dove gazed from his perch on this exhibition with a mind innocent of suspicion, as ever; but the hard-faced man who crouched and peered from the copse below, with remains of broken food lying near him, and pistols in his pockets, saw it from the front, and was grimly amused.

CHAPTER XIV

AN INVITATION OVER A FENCE

IT was natural that Dorrily Thorn should do what was possible to withdraw her aunt from the notice of the neighbours, in the circumstances wherein she stood — and, indeed, in a smaller measure, to withdraw herself. Jarge Crick's fantasies had not only grown by his own embellishments and expansions, but by the repetition and imagination employed in carrying them through the district; and soon there was not a household in all Rochford Hundred that had not the news of the horrid bedevilment of Castle Hill on the night when Abel Pennyfather's cow went astray, and scarce half a dozen that had the same tale, except in so far as all agreed that Mrs. Martin made a leading figure in it. More, Em Banham was "took comical" again, and was growing worse. The shock of the explosion and the excitement of fair day had expended their influence, and now, in the

dull round of daily muddle that was all her life, she was relapsing into the state of "all-overs" that Cunning Murrell's art had proved to have been the demoniac work of Mrs. Martin. The consequent demeanour of the villagers was unpleasant. There was something peculiarly insufferable in the laboured civility of the most of them, something more hopeless and repellent altogether than the mere persecution of daring hobbledehoys who cried "Witch!" and flung clods. When a woman changed her course, so as to pass to the right, offered her "Good morning" with a visible anxiety to get it out before the other could speak (a needful precaution with all witches), and went off out of sight as quickly as might be, there was that in the civility that made it worse than insult. It could not be resented, and it was sign of a cutting off from human accord.

So that the two women kept to themselves more than ever, and did none of the occasional field work wherewith they had aided their small resources in other years. Instead they busied themselves more in their own little garden, whose produce went a good way toward keeping them in food. Dorrily found that this work was good for her aunt, who was quiet and seemingly happy so long as she was

undisturbed; though the clouding of her mind persisted, and made the girl's loneliness harder to support than ever.

The night succeeding that on which Dorrily had been awakened by the sound of shots, was another of little rest for Mrs. Martin, albeit there was no disturbance from without; and when she showed some signs of fatigue in the garden the next morning, Dorrily was quick to persuade her to rest, and soon had the satisfaction to see her dozing in her arm-chair in the keeping-room. So she left her there, partly closed the door, and returned to her work.

She had piled aside the early bean-stalks which she had rooted up, keeping one or two of the largest for earwig-capture, and now she set to loosening the ground they had occupied. She dug and turned steadily, and it was plain to see that the symmetry of her figure owed its debt to bodily exercise; for on that condition alone is it permitted a woman to use a spade with grace.

She was watching her work, and was conscious of no witness till a shadow fell along the ground before her, and young Sim Cloyse's voice said:

"Yow den't ote to be diggin' a garden with hands like they. Not when yow might be in a silk gownd, takin' your ease."

He leaned on the fence with his elbows, smiling as amiably as an unsuitable countenance would permit. Dorrily said nothing, though she reflected that Jack Martin would have made no compliments, but would have taken the spade to do the work himself; as, for that matter, would Steve Lingood or Roboshobery Dove, wooden leg notwithstanding.

"Not but what it doan't suit yow," young Sim went on gallantly. "Most things do."

"Thank 'ee, Master Cloyse," Dorrily answered calmly, without looking at him; and went on digging.

Young Sim shifted his feet and rubbed his palm over an ear. He was considering what to say next.

"'Tis a fine day agin," he remarked at last.

Dorrily assented.

"An' 'tis lookin' like a good harvest."

Dorrily thought so, too.

Young Sim shifted his feet again, and rubbed the other ear.

"Yow doan't fare over glad to see me," he complained.

That was the truth; so Dorrily said nothing.

"But 'tis a monsus treat for me when I see you." He said it with an earnest leer that brought

a flush to Dorrily's cheek, and set her digging faster.

Having got out this sentiment, young Sim took breath again. It is not easy for one person to keep going a conversation of this sort. The pause endured for a few seconds, and then he tried another tack.

"I be pardners with my father now," he said, complacently.

Dorrily was glad to hear it.

"An' we're takin' arl Paigles's crops this year for money owin'," he went on, with pride.

This commercial victory only stirred Dorrily so far as to say: "I 'm very sorry for Master Paigles." A perversity shocking to young Sim's ideas.

He stared blankly for some little while, more at a loss than ever. At last he said plaintively: "Yow be deadly hard on a chap."

Dorrily began to feel a little impatient. "Hard on what chap?" she asked, disingenuously.

"Ho! yow dunno! Not you!" young Sim replied, with a grin. "But yow han't no need," he went on. "I count I be as good as one or two round these parts; so now!"

Dorrily did not dispute the proposition.

"An' could spend fower pound a week if need was."

This was another remark that seemed to need no answer.

"Ay, an' putt by, too, arl the while."

Dorrily left her spade in the ground and stood to tie the strings of her sun-bonnet closer. Above the stretch of green meadow that rose before her, with its near line of black fence, there was a patch of turnip ground, and beyond and above that again a jumble of sheds and a house in the middle of them. A female figure in a print gown stood by the nearest shed, shading eyes and looking down toward the black cottage.

"Prittywell fair be Saturday week," said young Sim Cloyse.

The remark might seem inconsequent, but there was no disputing it. So Dorrily said "Yes," and turned to her work again.

"Yow fare dull here, I count," young Sim pursued, getting it out with a rush. "Come 'ee along o' me a-fairin' to Prittywell fair o' Saturday week."

The sun-bonnet hid Dorrily's face as she stooped, so that he saw nothing of frown and bitten lip; but went on to offer the greatest inducement he could invent.

"I 'll take two pound and spend it arl." he said.

Dorrily left the spade again and stood erect.

There was a white spot on the clear brown skin at the turn of each nostril, and young Sim Cloyse took his elbows from the fence when he saw her face.

"I thank 'ee, Master Cloyse," she said; "but I don't go fairin' these times at all. But if you 'll turn about an' look up to Banham's, 'haps you 'll be reminded of Hadleigh fair, which was none so long ago."

Sim started and turned his head, and truly enough there was Mag Banham in her print gown, far up the slope by the sheds, looking down at him.

"Dang 't!" exclaimed young Sim under his breath; and backed away sheepishly toward the lane.

CHAPTER XV

A PRIVATE DANCE

OLD Sim Cloyse considered his son's reports, and made himself certain that the coast-guard had had no hand in the interruption of his enterprise. His reason also inclined him to the conviction that he owed his scored arm to Golden Adams. Young Sim was very suspicious of Roboshobery Dove; but perhaps his judgment was affected by the scare he had suffered. In any case old Sim's course was resolved on: to buy off Cunning Murrell.

Plainly he had not as yet given the revenue men information, but he might do it whenever he began to doubt that the service of Adams's interests would pay as well. And it was certain that there could be no getting at the tubs while that desperado sat over them every night with loaded pistols. So that on every score it was necessary to win over Murrell: in order to avoid the interference of the

coastguard, and in order to circumvent Golden Adams. For Cloyse was resolved above all things that now Adams should get not one penny from the venture, even if he, Sim Cloyse himself, had to hand over the whole thing, tubs, Adams, and all, to the Queen's men ; more, that he should be punished, in one way or another, with every circumstance of spite. For one of the few luxuries that old Sim Cloyse was ever willing to pay for, and to pay for well, was to grind the face of an enemy : to grind it off his head, to grind it till the very head was ground off his shoulders.

But he saw no reason yet for doing it expensively this time. First, at any rate, he would see what could be done to secure the "stuff" ; for it was plain that with Cunning Murrell it must be merely a matter of price. So he drew on his coat, with the careful aid of young Sim—for the sleeve was sore tight over the bandage—took his thick stick and his glazed hat, and started up Church Hill to gain Hadleigh by road. For the present he was shy of the way over the marshes.

He timed himself to be there as darkness fell. One of his reasons was that he was not anxious to exhibit himself publicly as a visitor at Murrell's door ; for he was so much a man of note in the

neighbourhood that the report of such a visit would give rise to much discussion and inconvenient conjecture. But in any case at nightfall was the likeliest time to see the cunning man; for in daylight he was often hard to come at, and once night was fully set in he was like to be off on his travels and lurkings, with umbrella and frail.

The light was at its sweetest and mellowest: the light that comes with clean air and sweet smells at the end of a shining day, soothing the eyes and painting the world with its loveliest colours. Not with red sunset, for that was yet to come: but dazzling no more, and setting all things above the long shadows in a mild harmony, where the rawest noonday hue is suave. The grey old church tower stood high against the blue, and dead John Loten's ivy stirred in the light breeze. Leigh roofs clustered red below, and beyond them was the soft salt water lying out to sea for many a calm mile.

But old Sim Cloyse tramped ahead on business intent, and bothered his crafty old brain with no fancies. He went round behind the tall, dull rectory wall and over the waste piece beyond, undisturbed by the noisy debate of the rooks in the rectory ground. He climbed readily over the gate

into the first beanfield, for he was no very old man yet, though they called him old Sim. And so he went along by the side of one field and across the next, till he came out at the gate in the road, just short of Lapwater Hall, and set his face toward the now reddening sun. He never turned his head as he passed the hall itself, to look for the highwayman's ghost that offered wayfarers a drink of beer; for he had no superstitions outside the system of book-keeping by double entry. In fine, he kept his wide face and his little eyes steadily toward the sun, till a sound of gallop and rumble on the road behind him was come so near that he must needs sidle toward the ditch, and look about him to save his bones.

It was the shrimp-cart from Leigh, the fastest thing on wheels from here to London, whither it was bound. Built like a roomy farm waggon, but lighter everywhere, piled high with hampers, and spinning along at the heels of four stout bays, its passing was the event of the evening along forty miles of road. There was one change of horses, at Shenfield; and though it was called the shrimp-cart, shrimps made a small part of its load, which was of fish of every sort that the Leigh fleet brought in, and of cockles and oysters. The

shrimp-cart was also the Leigh coach, in its way. For, in the rare event of any man of Leigh or Hadleigh daring to go a-journeying so far as London, or, as was scarcely less rare, to some place distant on the way, he sought passage in the shrimp-cart, where a seat among the hampers was always easy to find.

Sim Cloyse stood up by the ditch, and the shrimp-cart went by with a rattle and a whisk of dust, the driver raising his whip in salutation as he passed. In a moment it was ahead, visible merely as a receding pile of hampers, bedded on a little cloud of dust. But it carried a passenger, who sat up there among the hinder baskets, reading in a little book. Cloyse shaded his eyes with a hand, and though it was not easy to see, because of the sun beyond the cart, he thought he could recognise the passenger, and that it was Cunning Murrell. And, indeed, he was right.

This set him doubting afresh. Why had Murrell been to Leigh, and where was he going now? His own business so filled old Sim Cloyse's eyes and head that he did not stay to reflect that the wise man's concerns lay everywhere among the people of those parts, and that any other of them might well have taken him to Leigh, or even on to

London, for that matter; but was uneasy at the conjecture that Murrell must have been to the coastguard officers. For a moment Cloyse hesitated in the road; but painly nothing was to be got by hanging back now, so he went ahead again.

It was dusk when he came up with the black trees and the little point of spire that marked Hadleigh, and the shrimp-cart had passed through the village more than a quarter of an hour since. He turned the corner into the lane, and rapped with his stick at Murrell's door. He could see that a rushlight was burning in the keeping-room; but whether that meant that Murrell was within, and so had not gone on farther in the shrimp-cart, he could not guess: the ways of the house being strange to him.

Ann Pett opened the door, first a little way; and then, without speaking, she flung it wide, for she had had her orders. Murrell was sitting at his table, the candle burning at his elbow, and his head bowed over his little book.

"Come yow in, Master Cloyse," he said, without raising his head. "Come yow in, an' soon I will answer your doubt."

Cloyse entered, and the door was shut behind him. He had never been in this room before, well

as he knew the cunning man by repute, and now he sat and stared; not because the room, nor even his odd reception, impressed him particularly, but because there was nothing else to do; for Murrell not only kept his eyes on his book, but raised his hand to enjoin silence. It was a strange little book, Cloyse noticed; rather like a fat prayer-book sewed in a pocket-book cover; though instead of print it seemed to be filled with small writing and cranky figures.

There was a long pause. Ann Pett had vanished as soon as she had seen Cloyse seated, and now he sat and stared, and wondered honestly how Murrell had known it was he, since he had never once looked up at him.

Presently Murrell said, still with his eyes on the book: "As to your doubt, Master Cloyse, the answer is: 'They do not.'"

Old Sim Cloyse stared harder than ever. He had come prepared to be uncommonly civil, and was loth to judge the other drunk.

"As to your question, I have the answer, but wait till you put it."

Murrell shut the book, put it in the drawer among the papers, and took off the iron-rimmed spectacles. Then he sat back in his chair, and faced his visitor.

Cloyse stooped, and put his hat on the floor, under his chair, which was the polite thing to do with one's hat in those parts. His good manners were grown somewhat rusty from disuse, as he knew, and he was anxious to forget nothing. Then as he rose he made to wipe his forehead with his hand, an action which becomes a habit with them that wear hard glazed hats; but he had forgotten his sore arm, and half way he let it drop, with a twitch of the mouth. Nothing ever escaped Cunning Murrell's eyes that it was possible for a man to see.

"Good evenin', Master Murr'll—sir," old Sim began, with a quick addition of the last word, which he was near missing. 'Yow were kind enough for to inform me when fust I were at the door—for to inform me 'they do not.' If 'tis no liberty, I would wish for to say I den't quite unnerstand."

"Yow come to me, Master Cloyse, with doubts in your mind, as many oathers do. Yow were troubled with this doubt, arl the way here an before: 'Do the coastguard know of arl my business consarns for, say, a fortnit, or any of them?' Troubled in your mind with these hainish an' grievous doubts, yow come to me for relief, as

many oathers do; an' I answer the doubts in your mind plain on the instant. 'They do not' were my answer."

Whether or not old Sim Cloyse was impressed exactly in the way that Murrell desired—and Murrell loved his artistry for its own sake—he took the explanation gratefully.

"I thank'ee, Master Murr'll, sir," he said; "an' yow hev made my mind much easier. An' most wonnerful scientific, too, knowin' the thoughts o' my head afore I had time to speak 'em. An' most kind, sarten to say, arter I had treated yow that rude when yow so kindly give me a wisit. For that behaviour, Master Murr'll, I ask pardon. I were took that of a heap, I den't know what to say."

Cunning Murrell lay back in the chair that was a deal too big for him, watching Cloyse's face keenly as he brought forth laboriously his unaccustomed apologetics. But he said nothing, and Cloyse went on.

"I den't know what to say, Master Murr'll, sir, as well yow may guess, the business bein' what it were. For when a man hev business o' that sort, Master Murr'll, it be nat'ral he doan't crake 'bout it; ben't it?"

He looked appealingly at the little old man, but his only answer was a calm "Go on."

"A man doan't crake 'bout sich business, an' he doan't 'spect anybody else to know. Consekins when a genelman—even a genelman o' great larnin' as he respects, like yourself—kims an' plumps out with it arl to's face, 'tis nat'ral he be dunted and marthered arltogither. An' 'haps he sez what he doan't mean, bein' took so, an' wantin' time to get his thotes togither."

Old Sim Cloyse was suffering for his politeness, for he felt sore need of his hat to turn about in his hands while he approached the real business.

"But when you'd a-gone," he went on, "I thote, an' I thote, an' I see I'd a-bin wrong to mistrust yow, Master Murr'll, sir—no, I doan't say to mistrust you, 'cause I den't do that, so celebrated a genelman as yow be; but I mean I see I'd a-bin wrong, to make, to—to—to fare, to seem, to mistrust you, Master Murr'll." Old Sim was sure nobody could get it down any finer than that. "An' so, thinks I, I'll ask pardon o' Master Murr'll, and prove I doan't hev any mistrust by a-tellin' him arl the business to the bottom, open an' 'boveboard."

Cunning Murrell was all alert, but his vanity was

indulged, nevertheless, by these respectful amends, and he so far relaxed as to nod complacently.

Old Sim Cloyse was commonly a man of few words, and he felt that his resources in that respect were nearing exhaustion. So he went to business.

"Yow kim to me, Master Murr'll, sir," he said, "on the part of a—a Consulter: name yow den't mention. I, likewise, now kim to you, as yow knowed so wonnerful scientific before I spoke, as a Consulter. I dunno if it be an offence to a genelman o' your larned celebrity to ask if that 'ere first Consulter behaved so proper as to offer what might be called compensation, or a fee, in adwance? Beggin' humble pardon if it be."

"No," Murrell answered frankly, "he den't pay a farden."

"Ah," Cloyse replied with the tone of a man who plays a trump, for now he began to be confident; "then 'tis my dooty fust to prove that there be a difference in Consulters, Master Murr'll, sir, an' that the more respeckful an' proper-minded sort o' Consulters do value your larned knowledge an' scientific powers as they ote to should. There, Master Murr'll, sir, be a fi'pound note, as a small compensation in adwance, afore I say anoather word.'

Murrell bent his head graciously in acceptance; but he was mindful of his dignity, and let the note lie on the table.

"Well, Master Murr'll, sir," Cloyse went on, after a pause, rubbing his forehead, but this time being careful to employ his left hand; "so much done, I count we stand that one Consulter as kims to you 'bout his bit o' business, an' pays nothen, is done with. The oather Consulter kims about *his* bit o' business, an' pays in adwance, an' ready to pay agen, as is proper an' fair. To say nothen o' the rediklus little as is give by the officers for information, an' the harm as sich would do in the neighbourhood to any respected public genelman. . . . Well, sir, fust, where be Golden Adams?"

"No, Master Cloyse; since yow've come to make me offers so han'some an' lib'ral, *fust* I ask of your health. How's your arm?"

"My arm, Master Murr'll, sir?"

"Ay—your right arm, up there. Yow han't no outside bandages nor nothen to show, 'tis true; but yow den't think I could fail to know 'bout it did yow?"

Cloyse passed his left hand gently over the place, and stared. "Why," he said, "I den't think he knowed he hit me at arl, let alone where."

"Right. He den't know. An' he dunno yet."

Cloyse transferred the rubbing to the back of his head. Then he asked slyly: "Who?"

"I might answer, 'him that fired the pistols.' But you hev paid a han'some fee, an' must hev arl I can give for it. I mean Golden Adams."

"Ah," said Cloyse, "I guessed as much." Plainly he had played the right game, and Murrell was bought wholly. "An' where be he now?"

"The sarten and exact sput at this moment o' time," Murrell answered deliberately, "I might discover by exercise of the curis an' lawful arts I hev, though it would take a little time; an' by then he might ha' moved a yard or two. But I take it yow doan't wish to employ my secret arts, but to know what I know now, in the common human way, o' where Golden Adams be?"

"Ay," Cloyse replied, and nodded energetically.

"At this moment," Murrell answered, with a quick twist of his head toward the wooden clock, "as near as I can judge it, Golden Adams be about hafe a mile off. That bein' to say on Castle Hill, watchin', with two large pistols an' a cudgel."

"An' do he go every night?"

"Ay, every night; an' keeps pretty nigh, too, every day."

"An' what do he say he 'll do?"

"Says he 'll stand over the property till he drops dead, or has his dues."

Old Sim Cloyse shut his jaws with a snap, and the veins thickened on his forehead. "Master Murr'll, he shan't hev a farden! A murderin' gallows villain! He shan't hev a farden, Master Murr'll; we 'll give him his dues!"

"I 'm willin' to do my part thereunto," Murrell responded; but his gaze on old Sim Cloyse was none the less keen. "What might you think o' doin'?"

"Master Murr'll, we can afford to wait, an' he can't. Hev he got any money?"

"None at arl; not to say money. A few shilluns, mayhap."

"Then he can't get the property away. Now, Master Murr'll, sir, I hev gladly paid yow five pound for adwice an' information, an' I will be open with yow as yow with me. I must get that property away; but stands to reason I can't while that deadly rapscallion stands agin it with hoss-pistols and cudgels, desprit rip as he be. One man like that can keep off fifty, to say nothen o' the noise o' shootin' bein' heard. Now, Master Murr'll, I 'm ready to pay agen, an' pay more, to get Golden

Adams off Castle Hill. Yow can easy find a way o' persuading' him off, an' then let me know when arl 's clear. Will yow do that?"

Murrell put his head aside sagaciously. "'Tis no doubt," he said, "I can find ways o' gettin' him off Castle Hill, an' leavin' your lawful property for yow to take." He paused and smiled shrewdly. "Master Cloyse!" he went on, "come, I 'll be open about myself as well as about Golden Adams. I were in Leigh but an hour or two back."

"Yes?"

"To see yow."

"'Bout this?"

"About this. I thought to hint yow might clear Golden Adams from Castle Hill and get your property by—well, by makin' an arrangement with me. But it were brote to me that yow were seen to go out; an' I came on in the shrimp-cart. . . . Well, yow be ready to make sich an arrangement. Name your offer.'

Old Sim Cloyse looked hard at Murrell. "Master Murr'll, sir, get that man out o' the way, an' when I 've got the stuff I 'll pay yow—twenty pound.'

Cunning Murrell rubbed his chin. "That be very handsome, Master Cloyse, very handsome, sarten to say," he said, blandly. "The bargain

be that I get Golden Adams away from Castle Hill, one night, or arltogither, an' give yow notice, that yow may move your property. When yow've got your property, an' not before, yow pay me twenty pound. Very good. I make that bargain."

"Good indeed then, Master Murr'll. We unnerstand one anoather." Old Sim Cloyse grinned and winked, and slapped his knee. "'Twill be as well, 'haps, that yow den't be seen comin' to Leigh to see me, nor I here to see yow, till the job's settled. An' now, how d'ye think yow'll manage it?"

"That I shall consider, Master Cloyse. Mayhap one way, mayhap anoather—pretty sartenly in a way yow won't be expectin'. But leave that to me."

"Master Murr'll, sir, I hev showed my respeck for your larnin' an' my trust in your wisdom that be so scientific. I *will* leave it to yow—arl. We unnerstand one anoather, Master Murr'll, an' arter what's passed there be no need for me to bespeak yow to keep it close."

"No need at arl, Master Cloyse." Murrell pushed back his chair. "No need at arl. Secrecy I must keep, both for your sake an' mine. An' when I send yow a message, or what not, that yow may find your property at your disposal,

'twill be in sich terms as we hev spoke this evenin'. *Property* we carl it, without bein' more partic'lar."

Cloyse rose, but stood and scratched behind his ear, as though some lingering doubt remained. Then he bent toward Murrell and said: "Hev he told anybody else?"

"Not a soul but me."

Cloyse nodded, thought and scratched a little more, and asked: "There be no chance, be there, Master Murr'll, that he get movin' it unbeknown to yow?"

"Master Cloyse, I assure yow there be none. Not a—well, not a piece o' that property can be moved unbeknown to me. 'Tis arl at my fingers' ends. The fee yow offer, Master Cloyse, the very handsome fee yow offer, be greater by far, I confess, than any I hev ever taken. If in any way I fail yow, I shall lose it, that's arl. But I will go so far as to promise yow shall have your property, every—every bit of it."

He said it with a confident assurance that was very welcome to old Sim Cloyse; who groped for his hat, found it, and presently was gone, after Murrell had first cautiously peered forth and found nobody near.

Cunning Murrell shut the door quietly. He turned, looked round the herb-hung walls, and burst into a wide grin—such a grin as nobody, not even Ann Pett, was ever allowed to see on his face. Then he raised his hands over his shoulders, letting the fingers hang near his ears, and slowly danced on tiptoe round the table; and the dance was as silent as the grin.

Now if Cunning Murrell had had a favourite son whom he was bringing up in the practice of his own trade, he might have seized this opportunity to call him in and impress on him certain maxims which, though never precisely formulated, had always governed himself. As for instance:—

"Be upright in all things. If there be a contention, and one of the parties come to you, knowing you to have been already retained on the other side, whatever error you may induce him to commit, whatever loss of money he may incur, and whatever information you may pump out of him, will be the result of his own fault."

"Shame the devil by telling the literal truth. If any man be deceived by the literal truth, he must be a fool, and deserves to suffer."

For indeed the long use of spells and conjurations had bred in him a vast regard for words

merely, since they were manifestly so potent an influence. Others have reached the same persuasion by a different road. So that to Murrell, as sometimes to greater men, a word, or a phrase, or a sentence, which accorded precisely with his inmost mind, and at the same time was apt in particular circumstances to carry a wholly different meaning to the minds of others, was a valuable instrument of trade.

He had, in fact, expected just such a visit from Cloyse as he had received, for he had at least as clear and as quick a view of the position and chances of things as Cloyse himself. But finding that the visit did not come instant on the repulse by pistol-fire from Castle Hill, whereof he had learned from Golden Adams, he began to suppose that either Cloyse had been badly wounded, or was about to carry the business in some unknown way; and being, by reason of the poverty of the moment, near as impatient as Adams himself, he resolved to learn what he might at Leigh of Cloyse's health, and perchance see him and renew, in the light of fresh circumstances, the offers he had carried before. He had reached Leigh Strand in time to see Cloyse's departure from his house, and to observe the direction he had taken; and

then was able to take advantage of the shrimp-cart to reach Hadleigh first.

But all these matters, with the unformulated maxims, were hidden in the cunning man's head; for he had never had any favourite child, and of the two remaining alive the son was at that moment fast asleep in the farmhouse where he worked, three miles away, and had never been taught as much as to read; and the daughter, though she was but a few yards off, was as illiterate as her brother, and as dull of mind. So that none profited by Cunning Murrell's wisdom; and he, his dance danced to its end and his grin relaxed, took hat, umbrella, and frail, and soon was stealing down the castle lane, toward the stile.

CHAPTER XVI

A DAY AT BANHAM'S

THE little stars were gone, and of the great stars but one or two remained to twinkle yet a space in the west. Paleness had spread high in the sky, and away on the very edge of the waters, beyond where the Pan Sand and the Girdler lay invisible, a flush was rising and spreading. The broken towers of Hadleigh Castle were haggard in the grey light, and Golden Adams's face seemed scarce less haggard, as he rose from the stones whereon he had been sitting and dozing, stood erect, and stretched his arms. The hill and the marshes below, the water, and the far Kent shore, all were ashy grey alike, and over the marshes wisps and rags of white mist changed and turned and ran together like ghosts alarmed by the coming day.

The flush grew and deepened at the water's edge, and then, like arrows from the sun in

ambush, two long rays shot high above, and another. And with that the first tinge of colour was borne into the greyness, soft and vaporous, pink and blue, faint as pearl. More rays sprang, wider now, and in a moment a blazing segment stood above the sea. Light ran before it, leaving colour in its track, driving the ghosts into hiding behind copses and in the hollows of hills, and carrying the iridescence far to west and south. And at that the nests, restless already with wakening twitters, broke into full song, and began the eager traffic of the day. Hill and marsh were green and glistening, daisies peeped, and the sun lifted quick and great from the sea, and flung out its gold to make the blue water merry.

The old towers took the warmer tint of day, and Golden Adams's hard features regained their natural brown, no whit paled by his nights of watching and dozing. He took the fur cap from his head, beat off the dew against his palm, and shook more dew from his coat. Then, with a last look round land and water, he slowly descended to the coppice, there to lie for the day, and to sleep as he might.

Up in the meadows work was toward, and the sound of the stone sweeping the scythe-blade.

The life of Hadleigh and its fields went its even way till seven o'clock. Then the men trooped in to breakfast, and the cows trooped out from the morning milking.

Dorrily Thorn tended her aunt, worked in the garden, and after breakfast returned from the post-office happy in possession of a letter from Jack. Young Sim Cloyse straggled in from Leigh, indefinite of aim, but vaguely hoping that Dorrily Thorn might be in a less curt mood, and not altogether deaf to persuasion in the matter of Prittlewell Fair. Lingood's forge clanged and glowed; and Cunning Murrell slept till he was called to doctor Banham's horse.

At Banham's things were at sixes and sevens. Not that that was not the normal state of Banham's; but to-day things went wrong with a more than commonly persistent perversity. It was a suitable place for muddle and trouble, for Banham, like everybody hereabout, no matter what his regular trade, did his small bit of farming with an acre or so, a cow, and a few pigs, leaving it much to the mismanagement of his wife. If Mrs. Banham had had no more than her household duties to disorganise she would have done it very thoroughly, and would never have let a day slip without

broken crockery, spoiled meals, infantile avalanches on the stairs, tumblings into tubs, torn, scorched, and lost linen, and other such domestic entanglements. But all was chaos since those duties were complicated with attendance on a small farmyard: one set about with tottering sheds, whereof while the roof fell in the doors fell out; so that the Banham poultry and pigs pervaded the village as widely as the Banham offspring, and some of the latter were in perpetual quest and pursuit of some of the former.

But this day was worse than all. It was one of Banham's late-starting mornings, and Bobby, Jimmy, and the rest had all fallen downstairs and been patched and mended and smacked, and had spilt their teacups and been smacked again, and Mrs. Banham had industriously spread the beginnings of the day's disorder, ere Banham, going with young Dick, his eldest boy, to harness the horse, found it shivering and "winnicking" and lifting its off hind leg, whereon was a nasty cut, just over the fetlock. Banham, stooping to examine the cut, found both hind legs sore and bruised, and the animal very tender of a touch. Then Dick pointed to a splintered bucket in a far corner, and a little staring made it plain to

father and son that everything within hoof-reach had been kicked and broken—a thing not so instantly noticeable as it might have been, by reason of most things in the Banham establishment being broken already. And when the horse was unhaltered there was a sad large swelling just under the right eye, tenderer than all the bruises, and wholly closing the lids.

Poor Banham gaped and stared in dismay. A small bruise or a cut or two he would have treated well enough himself, but all this—and especially the mysterious swelling at the eye—must be seen to by Cunning Murrell. So Dick was sent for him with all speed.

Murrell found the whole family about the stable, which was a longish shed, made to accommodate the horse at one end and the cow at the other, with a cart between. Mrs. Banham's firm opinion was that the horse had been bewitched, and Mag Banham inclined to the same belief. Em chuckled and wept and winked that horrid wink that had returned to her of late.

Cunning Murrell went over the horse with practised fingers, and in response to Mrs. Banham's repeated suggestions of witchcraft was disposed to agree with her. How had the cow been?

Instantly it was remembered that all sorts of things had been amiss with the cow. She had been cross-grained yesterday, and reluctant to yield her milk; she had kicked over the pail on Tuesday—or was it Saturday? She was hot and feverish and fretful—which, of course, could not be due to the warm weather and nightly confinement in a shed. But more than all, Mag Banham had been at the churn all yesterday afternoon and part of the evening, and failed to make a single speck of butter.

Murrell nodded gravely, looked at the cow, and shook his head. No doubt it was a "sending"; an imp had tormented the horse, and probably had begun by biting it under the eye, driving it mad with terror, and causing all the trouble.

At this, young Dick, with a scandalous irrelevance, a youthful presumption and an impudent levity that shocked everybody, ventured to attribute the swelling to a possible wasp or hornet, lying "dummel" in the hay; even pretending that he had heard of such a case somewhere else. But his effrontery met its punishment, and he sidled off abashed and discomfited by the wise man's condign rebuke. And, indeed, as any one might know, even if the thing were a wasp or a hornet,

there was no more common form for any witch's imp to assume than that, except, perhaps, a spider.

So for the present Cunning Murrell washed and bound the cut, and made plasters of steeped herbs for the bruises and the eye; promising to call again, and in the meantime not only to send a drench for the cow, but to consider the matter of any amulet or conjuration that might seem needful in case the cures were delayed. But indeed, Murrell's fame as a cattle-doctor was merited, and Banham's horse was soon comforted by the plasters.

But Murrell was no sooner gone than more disasters of the night were revealed; for in another shed the old sow was found routing among the whole remaining store of mangels, which lay scattered about her, each with a large gnaw in its side; for merely to eat a few mangels and have done with the mischief was not in that sow's nature; she must take a bit out of every one, and so do as much ruin as possible.

Banham was a mild man in general, but now he snatched a hoe, and so plied the handle that the old sow went at a bolt, and overset a large part of the family on the mixen. And when the damage

was seen and lamented it grew plain to Mrs. Banham that here was proof, if more were needed, of the unholy source of all the other troubles; for it was remembered that this same sow had twice eaten her own pigs, and once had gobbled up a whole brood of chicks. It was perceived on examination that some time in the night, instigated by the devil, the brute had capsized the trough against the gate of the run; the hinges, cut from the uppers of an aged boot, had fetched away and let the gate—itself a medley of rotten boards and barrel staves—fall flat, so that the whole yard was open to the offender. How she got into the shed where the mangels lay was not so clear, though it was certainly by infernal aid of some sort, since nobody would admit having left the door open.

Here was a pretty state of things to begin the day with; and as the day went, so things went more awry. Banham had to stay at home, of course; and although it might seem that so unassuming an addition to the family numbers would make little difference, nevertheless his wife protested that he hindered everything, and brought about a most distracting state of muddle: which he himself never ventured to doubt. Mag laboured

again at the churn, for nothing; and Mrs. Banham took a clamorous turn herself, with as little result. But to tell half the tale of that day's failures and troubles, and spillings, and breakings, and squabblings, and lamentations, would be too much. Let it suffice to say that in the afternoon the biggest dish fell from the topmost shelf of the dresser on a pile of unwashed crockery beneath, and Jimmy was convicted of ringworm.

Now for some time it had been observed with alarm that Em was "going comical" again; and when the big dish fell with a great crash, she flung back in her seat and laughed and laughed, and would not stop. And presently the laughs turned to shrieks, and her legs stuck out stiff before her, and she slid off the chair on her back; her arms jerked like a string-jack's, the shrieks wore away hoarsely, and when Mag and her mother went to lift her she bit at them like a dog.

If it were possible to suppose a doubt that all their troubles were caused by witchcraft this would have removed it. It was plain, as soon as there was time for consideration, that here must be the work of a confederation of witches; unless, indeed, Cunning Murrell's burst bottle had been ineffectual against Mrs. Martin—which it most manifestly had

not been. It was long known that there were, and always would be, three witches in Hadleigh, for Murrell had himself proclaimed it. But of late years their identity had been doubtful, till Mrs. Martin had been proved to be one of them. Now, her own power over the Banhams having been weakened by Murrell's triumphant operation, she had doubtless called in the aid of others, her niece, Dorrily Thorn, being one of them without a doubt. For was she not actually seen with her aunt, conspicuous in the forefront of a satanic orgy at night on Castle Hill, by Jarge Crick, as honest a man as any in these parts? And Mag was even more positive, for she had spent the night awake and weeping because this same Dorrily Thorn had put a spell on young Sim Cloyse, drawing him away, changing his temper and feelings, and attracting him to herself: a thing that nothing but witchcraft could explain. She had seen the thing with her own eyes, looking down the hill; and it was doubly cruel, too, for had not Dorrily Thorn her cousin, Jack Martin? And at the thought poor Mag grew as bitter as her mother—perhaps bitterer.

Here was fine matter for the gossips, and great work for Cunning Murrell: nothing less than a combined attack of witches on one innocent family,

afflicting it at a swoop with an imp-tortured horse, a fiend-ridden pig, a doubtful cow, and a bedevilled churn, to say nothing of a bushel of broken crockery, and wholly disregarding the ringworm. But chief of all, here was Em Banham "took comical" once more, and worse than ever; biting and snapping at her mother's hands, and even at her own.

When at last Mrs. Banham and Mag succeeded in finding Cunning Murrell it was in evening dark, and he was coming up Castle Lane with the accustomed umbrella over his shoulder, but with a far bigger frail than common hanging from its handle; a full and bulging frail, too, full of something that seemed heavy. And he was angry when they rushed upon him, and bade them hold their tongues and go; though he promised to come to them presently, and kept his promise.

CHAPTER XVII

THE CALL OF TIME

ROBOSHOBERY DOVE had finished his breakfast, smoked a pipe, and looked round his garden. He had been hoeing before the meal, and now nothing remained to do. Every upturned flower-pot on a stick had been emptied of its entrapped snails and replaced, every dying leaf had been cut away and buried, and not a growing thing was visible that had not a comforting hoeing of moist earth heaped about its root. Nothing, dead or alive, was out of its place, and there was no weed anywhere. Roboshobery Dove stumped along the narrow paths, bright with broken cockle-shell, in a clean green smock and a varnished hat that sent a little patch of reflected light dancing, sometimes on the cottage wall, sometimes among the thick leaves of his best plum tree, and sometimes into the dazzled eyes of a chance passenger beyond the fence. There was nothing left to do in the garden

—absolutely nothing, even in Roboshobery's eyes, the climbing rose that went up beside the cottage door and spread over the lintel to the right and over a window to the left, clung close and went everywhere, with an even space between twigs and branches, like the veins on a butterfly's wing. Even the blossoms had fallen into an orderly habit, and every bud seemed to spring at a just distance from its neighbour, so that the old seaman could nowhere find a spot where another nail might be driven with advantage, nowhere detect a superfluous twig, and nowhere discover a mildewed leaf. Even the unruly clematis on the side wall rose with rigid system ere it broke at last into its luxuriant valance of dark leaf and purple blossom. For a moment Roboshobery eyed his doorposts and his front gate, but there was no excuse for another coat of paint in any part of their perfect whiteness; so he pushed the gate open and came into the road.

It was a forward year, as one might tell by the nearest cornfield, whose colour was of August rather than of July. The scent of the bean-fields thinned and grew subtler, though potent still to fuddle drunken wasps and tumbling butterflies; and all the air was strong with the breath of a lusty summer. Dove went—sauntered, as well as a man

with a wooden leg could—toward the four-wont way, there to take observation north, west, east, and south-west along the cross roads. To the east Hadleigh street tailed away in the sunlight, and gave little sign of life beyond the merry ring of quick blows from Lingood's smithy; west lay the road to London by way of Bread-and-cheese Hill, and there was nothing but a distant farm waggon creeping up from Vange; north was the road to Rayleigh, empty to sight save for the felled log on the wayside grass, whereon the village elders sat for evening recreation; so that Roboshobery Dove turned to the Bemfleet road, to walk just so far along it as would bring him to the nearest view of broad water and the traffic of Thames mouth. For to him this view was something like the reading of a newspaper; not a speck of humanity crawling and skipping on the green marshes far below, not a boat pulling through the blue water, but told some tale of local news to his long-used eyes; and all the tidings of London port were set before him, with no obscuring medium of print.

Where the road swung to the right he pushed aside a gate and entered a meadow. At the gate the Kent hills made a blue horizon, and in twenty yards one saw the Kent shore; twenty yards more,

and many square miles of blue water lay below, gay with sunlight; and then the meadow fell away in a slope, and Canvey Island and the marshes lay green and flat below, like a great map.

Tide was low, and at the causeway from Bemfleet to the island an uncommon black patch was moving. It lengthened out in the wetter parts, and showed itself to be a crowd of men. The foremost were scarce high and dry on the island ere Dove, as much by induction as by his keen eyesight, perceived the purpose of the gathering.

"'Tis a prize-fight!" he said. "From Lunnon!" And instantly scrambled back at his best pace for the gate.

It was two miles to the causeway by the road, and there was no time to waste, or he would lose much of the fight ere he could come up with it. It might even be over if they were quick and it were a bad match. On the other hand it were a mean thing to rush off alone and tell none of his friends. Distracted between his two minds, he clapped hand to jaw and roared "Prentice ahoy!" in the direction in which Prentice's kitchen chimney was just visible, away in the village. The shout might have been heard at Beggar's Bush, but there came no answer, and at that moment Roboshobery

perceived a boy grubbing for dandelion roots under the hedge. "Here, younker!" he called, "run an' tell Master Prentice, an' Master Lingood, an' Master Fisk, an'—an' anybody else yow see, there's a Lunnon prize-fight down to Canvey!" And instantly hurried off down the Bemfleet road.

Now Roboshobery Dove's enthusiasm had caused him to forget the penny that would have sent the boy back on the errand without hesitation. As for the boy, he reflected that while he was carrying the news about the village he would be losing a deal of the fight himself; and a careful balancing of the advantage and consideration of being the bearer of important news before the event, against that of bringing home the tale of a prize-fight that nobody else had seen, led in a very few seconds to his stuffing into the hedge the old table-knife he was using, and hastening through the gate into the meadow; to gain Canvey Island by a direct route down hill-faces and over wet marsh, easy and quick enough for a boy, but not to be contemplated by anybody with a wooden leg. So that nobody from Hadleigh saw the fight but Roboshobery Dove and his truant messenger.

As for Dove, he stumped along with steady haste

down the lane to Bemfleet. This was not the first fight, by many, that had come off on Canvey Island, and now that the railway was brought down almost to Bemfleet, the island was grown an uncommonly convenient spot.

The lane wound, ever descending, under the shade of tall trees, sometimes deep between banks, sometimes on the open hillside. At the first clear drop on the left, where water and marsh came in view again, Dove could see the crowd making briskly for the middle of the island, men carrying the ropes and stakes not far from the leaders; and then a little wood sprang on the hillside, and shut all out.

Presently, on the right, the hill fell away wholly, and left the road, descending still, to top its last ridge; throwing wide a great picture where Essex lay broad and fecund below, dotted with a score of hamlets, richly embushed with trees, motley with fields of many colours, and seamed with hedges. But Roboshobery's face was turned the other way, over the water and the island, where the crowd was a less conspicuous mark now that it was seen from behind rather than from above. It was plain, however, that the battle-field had been reached, for a white spot in a meadow by Kibcaps Farm

presently rose to a point, and was clearly a tent. Roboshobery reflected that the choice of ground was a good one, since the hay had lately been cut from that meadow, and the turf was springing again, fresh and short.

The road took a steeper pitch and a turn between high banks which allowed only an occasional peep over the open, waterwards: a peep that now included the stout square tower of Bemfleet Church, with its little wooden spire. Dove kept his pace at a steady thump, till he came on level ground at last by the church itself, and went on past the old carved wooden porch, whose posts were nailed thick with stoats and polecats; still with his eyes fixed ahead.

Nothing was visible of the crowd now, for all to be seen of Canvey Island was the low line of sea-wall across the Ray; though stragglers were still crossing, and several labourers from the new railroad were in view, who had flung down pick and shovel and were now making their best pace for the causeway. Dove picked his way with care over the rotten wood and wet stones, over the mud bank alive with little staggering crabs, and so gained the low road, confined by sea-wall on each side. There was still a mile to walk to the fight,

though the way was level—the island, indeed, was everywhere flat as the water about it.

When at last he came again in sight of the crowd the fight was going merrily, and a tide of yells rolled back and forth across the field. Already the tent was demolished, having first been abandoned as a superfluous luxury once the men were stripped, and since having collapsed under the weight of unreasoning enthusiasts who in their efforts to find some commanding pitch on the dead flat of the meadow, had desperately stormed the canvas and clutched the pole at the top. But its mere presence was a sign that this was an important fight, furnished with uncommon elaboration, for Dove could not remember another fight hereabout to the use whereof a tent had been brought. And steadily under the broken surge of shouts ran the unceasing current of offered bets.

"I 'll back the little 'un!" sang out Roboshobery Dove, swinging up impetuously. "I 'll back the little 'un!" For backing the little one was a principle of his chivalry, which he was ever ready to uphold at any sacrifice, and which he now proclaimed, in his fervour, without staying to ascertain if there were any little one engaged.

It took a few minutes' steady struggle to find

out. It might at first be supposed that a man with a wooden leg would contend with a crowd at a serious disadvantage; but the point of that wooden leg with the most of fourteen stone weight above it, resting upon the live toes of a neighbour, would do much toward dispelling the opinion; and it will be perceived that if only you get far enough into a sufficiently thick crowd, you cannot be knocked down; indeed, in a crowd with anything of pugilistic tastes and education, there would be something more than reluctance to knock down a man who had lost a leg. So that, by one advantage and another, and not least by an energetic use of the stout arms still remaining to him, Roboshobery Dove presently found himself in a position to see the fight pretty clearly.

He was puzzled to guess which might be the little one. Near the centre of the square enclosed by the eight stakes and the two ropes the two men sparred, matched to a hair, or at any rate seeming so thus early in the encounter. Plainly they had fought just long enough to learn a little of each other's reach and style, and each had learned enough to decide him that nothing was to be gained by recklessness just yet. There was scarce a stain of grass on their white breeches, and the

affable grin on each face was marred by nothing worse than a smear of blood and a highly coloured eye. As for the men themselves, there seemed not a pound of weight to choose between them, and whether each was nearer twelve or eleven stone it would have been hard to say. A yellow silk handkerchief hung over a corner post, and a red one with white spots over that at the opposite angle; and two men were pushing through opposite parts of the crowd, one with a bundle of yellow handerchiefs and the other with a bundle of red and white. But customers for the colours were few just now, and the pushing and shouting and flourishing went for little profit.

"A shade of odds I'll take!" cried a man in a white hat. "A shade of odds on either man!"

Instantly half a dozen turned toward him. "What'll you take on the Bricky?" For it happened that the Bricky had finished the last round on top.

"Three to one," answered the man in the white hat, who was out on business.

"Gr-r-r! A shade of odds! A shade! Enough shade to sit under with a bloomin' tea-party!" Plainly most of the crowd were Londoners.

But now the Bricky was taking rather than

giving, having "napped" a double left, in consequence of being a trifle shorter in reach than Paddington Sharp, his opposite. But he milled in, and soon made matters seem even again. Truly it was a very good fight. Good men, well trained—their skins were like pink ivory—fighting their best, and losing no chance by haste or ill-temper. Roboshobery cheered both impartially, and raked his pocket with the view of backing his fancy as soon as he had decided what it was.

But four rounds went, and still he could not make up his mind. For with him the reasonable desire to back the probable winner was tempered by a Quixotic impulse, regardless of shillings, to back the resolute hero holding on against the odds of ill-fortune. This fact alone was apt to breed indecision; but here the chances hung now this way and now that, with so regular a swing that it was difficult to distinguish which man should be favoured by sympathy and which by commercial prudence.

The Bricky was picked up and taken to his corner with his grin unspoiled, though one ear was thrice the size of the other, and needed a touch of the penknife. A large and red-faced man in a white overcoat—the weather notwithstanding—who

stood just before Dove, opened a newspaper to seek information as to odds on a race; and Roboshobery, by twisting his neck, was just able to read a headline: "Latest News of the War." But he had scarce deciphered the capitals when the red-faced man doubled the column under, the better to read what he wanted.

Time was called, and Paddington Sharp and the Bricky sprang from their corners and went to business with a rattle. Plainly the Bricky had orders to mix things up, and he hammered in with all his steam. The Paddington champion was no way loth, and the knuckles pelted merrily all round the ring. The red-faced man, with a pecuniary interest in the Bricky, waxed clamorous, and brandished his newspaper, folded into a truncheon, till presently it knocked off a neighbour's hat. The neighbour said something hasty, and the red-faced man apologised, and let the paper drop.

Roboshobery Dove, eager for news, snatched it as it fell, and asked: "Den't yow want to keep the newspaper, sir?"

The red-faced man, without turning his head, bequeathed the newspaper to the devil, and proceeded to encourage the Bricky with more shouts.

Dove saw the round through, and made up his mind that the Bricky was doing best ; and as soon as the seconds had hold of their men he unfolded the paper and turned the war news uppermost.

The Black Sea news headed the column, and had nothing of importance. Nor did there seem anything very interesting at first under the heading "The Baltic Fleet." And then of a sudden, just at the cry of "Time," the paper went grey and blue before Roboshobery Dove's eyes, and the tumult of shouts died in his ears.

He turned about like a man deadly sick, seeing and hearing nothing, conscious merely of staggering and buffeting against one thing after another, till he was away from the crowd and out on the road leading to the causeway.

He took his way by instinct, looking straight ahead, but seeing nothing. He was vaguely conscious of an abatement of noise, but could hear nothing distinctly yet but the steady thump of the wooden leg beneath him, which now, singularly enough, obtruded itself on his senses as it never did commonly. But for long this sound and a feeling that he was walking in a road in daylight were all the impressions his senses gave him.

For he had read this paragraph in the London paper:

"LUBECK, Monday.—At Baro Sound a landing party from the frigate *Phyllis* was fired on by a small body of Russians, who decamped, leaving one dead and two wounded behind them. Our loss was John Martin, ordinary seaman, killed."

CHAPTER XVIII

HEAVY TIDINGS

ROBOSHOBERY DOVE was half way up the long hill between Bemfleet and Hadleigh ere the numbness left his faculties, and his first new impression was one of physical nausea. He was sick, sick in the stomach at each jolt of the wooden leg as he strode up-hill. Then he remembered the newspaper. It was still in his hand, and he looked at it blankly, without knowing why. He fell to slapping his thigh with it at each step, and trying hard to think.

Canvey Island began to look like a map again, and the crowd by Kibcaps Farm lay a dark patch with a little square hole in the middle, where Paddington Sharp and the Bricky still pummelled one another for fifty pounds a side. But Roboshobery Dove saw nothing of that. He had himself fought for his life, he had seen men killed at his side even when he was a small boy, but that had

never affected him like this. Why, he would have found it hard to say. For then he had seen the real thing, heard the groans and the babble of dying men, and felt the sticky, slimy blood under his bare feet on the deck; and now he merely read four lines in a London newspaper. Howbeit this was worse altogether.

He fell to wondering whom he should tell first; what Jack's mother would say or do; what the people would say who had been calling her a witch. Perhaps they would say it was a judgment. But there—he was sick; sick as a cat; and he shuddered.

He had an odd, vague feeling of responsibility. He was bringing the horrible news; how could he face the boy's mother and his cousin with it? More, how could he ever face them afterward? He had a confused feeling that he was somehow inflicting the blow himself.

So he took his way up the long hill, and at last emerged at the four-wont way. He went on past his own garden gate, without as much as a glance at the roses over his door or a look at the starlings that were ravaging his cherry tree. He hesitated for a moment at Prentice's gate, looked up the garden path, saw Mrs. Prentice at the upper window, and then went on to Lingood's forge.

Steve Lingood had that morning finished an order of Murrell's—almost a wholesale order. For the cunning man, finding himself in funds, had not only paid what he owed, but had bespoken three more bottles, to keep for sudden occasions. Murrell had given his order with an air, maintaining the advantage and authority which he felt that his rejection of Lingood's overtures had given him over the smith. Perhaps, also, because of a remote consciousness that as yet the effect had been a trifle impaired by the continuance of the little debt. Lingood, on his part, had a first impulse to refuse the work; but he was a man of common sense as well as of independence, and he reflected that such a refusal would irritate Cunning Murrell, and in that way do Dorrily Thorn and her aunt no good —might even jeopardise that secret of his own that was in the wise man's keeping. Further, that trade was trade, and the smith at Bemfleet or Leigh would make the bottles if he did not; and moreover, that another smith might do the work so thoroughly as to cause danger to life at the next explosion; whereas he, instructed by experience, might take private means to render that contingency less likely. Which, in truth, he did.

So he received the order civilly, and now the

three bottles lay, wet from the tank, on a bench, while he and the boy turned their attention to a plough coulter.

Roboshobery Dove stood in the doorway, and Lingood, apprised by an obstruction of light, looked up. The old seaman stood black against the light, and it was not until Lingood came to the door that he saw that his face, commonly so broad and so brown, was white and drawn.

"Why," said the smith, "yow fare gastered!"

Roboshobery Dove moved his lips, but found them dry; so he offered the newspaper, pointing to the paragraph with so thick and withal so shaky a forefinger that at first Lingood was puzzled to guess what piece of news had troubled him. Then young Jack Martin's name came in view, and the smith read.

He was never a demonstrative man, but now he dropped the newspaper and stared dully, like a sleep-walker. He paled, too; but for him this thing meant more than Dove knew, and he put his hand over eyes and forehead, as though something heavy had struck him there and distracted his senses.

"Larned him his cutlass drill myself," said Roboshobery, at last finding a thick utterance. "Larned him it when he were so high. An' I fit the French

myself the same age; but I den't feel it like this."

Lingood turned into the forge. For a few moments he said nothing, and Dove watched him anxiously as he stooped and moved one article and another this way and that, with his face from the light. Then, without turning, he asked in a strained voice: "Do *they* know?"

"His mother?"

"Ay."

"No. I brote the paper straight from Canvey, from a Lunnon man at the fight there. What shall's do?"

Lingood was silent. What could they do? Plainly Dorrily and her aunt must learn sooner or later, and the odds were that on Friday or Saturday there would be a newspaper brought in from Chelmsford, and then the news would fly over the village and perhaps fall on the bereaved women in some harsh and sudden way. Such a chance as that must be forestalled, somehow. But now his faculties were disordered, and he could not consider clearly.

"Shall's go an' ask Harry Prentice?" suggested Dove.

That seemed to be a reasonable notion. Prentice

was a staid old fellow, respected in the village, and not so closely acquainted with young Jack Martin as to lose his head at the news. So Lingood reached his coat and his cap. But then Dove remembered Mrs. Prentice, and it was resolved to send the boy to ask Prentice to come and speak to the smith.

Presently Prentice came, mightily astonished at the summons; for Hadleigh was not one of those places of business where interviews were often requested. People said what they wanted to say when and where they chanced to meet. Prentice came in his shirtsleeves, with no hat.

"Why," he said, "what's up? Hullo, Bosh—yow here? What is't arl?"

Dove gave him the newspaper as he had given it to Lingood.

Prentice took it to the light, read the paragraph, and looked serious. "That be young Jack Mart'n," he said, "sarten to say."

"Ay," Dove replied, "that it be. An' we want to know what about tellin' the boy's mother."

"O! Tellin' his mother!" said Prentice, doubtfully, thrusting his fingers up into his curly white hair. "Tellin' his mother! Umph!"

He looked from one to the other and then at the newspaper again. Then he put the newspaper into

the other hand, and seized his hair on the opposite side. "Tellin' his mother!" he repeated, doubtfully. He paused for a few seconds, and at last said: "Well, I dunno!"

"We fare a bit dunted like," Roboshobery Dove explained. "An' I thote 'haps that yow, bein' a knowledgeable man, an' one o' good gumption, might take it in hand to break it to 'em."

Prentice's mouth opened, and his face lengthened. "Me?" he exclaimed. "Me? Lord, no, not me! *I* can't do't! 'Twants a woman."

The others thought so too, though the fact had not struck them before. Plainly a woman would be best; but what woman? They could think of no woman who was friendly with Mrs. Martin: scarce of one that was not bitterly unfriendly: certainly of none that was not afraid of her.

"'Tis hard to know what to do," said Roboshobery Dove. "Summat we *mus'* do, that's plain. Somebody else may bring in the noos. Prentice, oad frien', 'twould be a Christian mussy if your missus 'ud go an' tell 'em."

Prentice shuffled uneasily. In his own mind he had secret doubts of his wife's Christian mercy toward witches—indeed, he judged her far too good a Christian to countenance any such weak-

ness. Nevertheless he could not refuse to ask her. So he went to do so.

But he was soon back. "She won't go," he said, with a glum shake of the head. "Says 'tis a judgment 'pon 'em for witchcraft, an' she wonders any honest man should counsel her to cross a witch's threshold so's to putt her in her power, soul an' body, let alone the mortal danger o' bein' bearer o' ill tidin's to sich. 'Twere all I could do to stop her coming an' tellin' of ye so, herself."

Dove and Lingood stood in gloomy doubt.

"'Haps Mrs. Mart'n knows it a'ready," Prentice suggested, brightly, as offering a cheerful way out of the difficulty. And presently added, inconsistently, "An' lor, them newspapers 'll say anythink!"

Neither Dove nor Lingood could extract much comfort from either reflection. The smith gazed at his smouldering fire for a few moments, thinking. Then he put his cap on his head, and said: "Come, Master Dove, we 'll talk o' this walkin'."

He led the way into the street, and Roboshobery Dove followed. Prentice rubbed his white curls again, looked blankly after the two for a few seconds, and then went slowly back home.

Lingood was still pale, but no longer in doubt. "*We* mus' do it," he said, "an' do it at once.

Prentice's wife knows it, an' that's within ten minutes o' sayin' that arl the village knows it."

"Ah, that is," Dove assented dolefully. He turned his head, and then added, "Why, damme, there she goes a'ready, with a hankercher on her head! No time lost with her!"

"Then so much better haste mus' we make," Steve Lingood replied. "There's no knowin' how't may come to them if it comes from others. Like as not Mrs. Banham may get hoad o't, an' go an' barl it at the door. She be bitter enough for anything."

"For that?" asked Dove as he mended his pace. "Bitter enough for that? Cuther! what a woman!"

"Ay, bitter enough for worse now young Em's so bad again, an' one thing an' another."

Hadleigh was a leisurely place for wayfarers, and women stared over fences to see Roboshobery Dove and Steve Lingood making good pace along the street, plainly with business in prospect.

Lingood said no more, and Dove was plunged in perplexity. What should they say when they got there? If only there had been news of a battle to tell of first: if only Jack Martin had fallen in the hour of a great victory, it would not have seemed

so hard a job. But as it was—shot dead from behind a hedge in a miserable little scrimmage that would be forgotten to-morrow—Roboshobery saw no way to the work.

They turned into the lane, and as they went Dove began to lag, though the younger man kept on steadily. Then said Dove, looking paler than ever: "Steve, my boy, I can't. I ben't game. I 'm afeard."

"Come," the smith answered, impatiently, "we mus' do 't, well or ill. 'Twill come better from friends than from foes, an' know it they must from some one, an' soon. I 'll say 't myself if need be. But come an' back me, at least."

Roboshobery Dove would never desert a friend who appealed for support, and he went on down the hill. But he had never before experienced such a fit of fear—simple terror at the few minutes before him.

They reached the black cottage at last, and Lingood went up the steps in the bank, Dove following with an unsteadiness that was scarce at all due to the wooden leg.

Visitors were rare at the cottage of late, and Dorrily, hearing the footsteps, came to the door. She had just composed her aunt to rest in a chair, and was anxious to keep her undisturbed. The

sight of the two men, the faces of both, the haggard helplessness on Roboshobery Dove's, struck her heart still. She closed the door behind her, and, filled with a shapeless fear, looked from one to the other. Then she caught sight of the folded newspaper still in the old sailor's hand, and something cold closed tight on her heart, and held it.

"'Tis—'tis—O—'tisn't Jack—is't?" she gasped. "Tell me—Master Dove—is't news?"

Dove only stared, pale and helpless. Lingood struggled with something gripping at his throat, and said: "There—there's—been some fightin'."

The girl could say nothing, but her eyes were wide and her cheeks pale.

"There's—been fightin'," Lingood struggled on, "an' 'tis thote—he may be one o' the wounded."

His face betrayed the kindly lie, and Dorrily looked mazedly at Dove. *His* face there was no mistaking. A little murmur came from the girl's throat, where something struggled, like a sob. She moved her lips, but there was no sound, and horror grew over her face. She moved her lips again, and Lingood, knowing what she would ask, nodded sorrowfully, and bowed his head.

For a moment she seemed like to fall. None but himself ever knew how well-nigh irresistible

was Lingood's impulse to catch her in his arms, though none could less readily have explained the honourable restraint that he put on himself. He clenched his hands and dropped them by his side, and it was Roboshobery Dove that took her and passed his great knotted hand gently over her hair and her cheek. "Poor gal! poor gal!" said Roboshobery Dove. And tears ran unrestrained over the old man's face.

But Dorrily's weakness did not endure; she had duties, and there was no leisure for swooning. She must go to Jack's mother. She stood, and put Dove's hand quietly back from her face, turned, and walked to the door. She faltered and stopped at the threshold with the thought of the poor broken mind within, and with the first glimmering of a sense of the task that lay before her. Then she lifted the latch and went in.

Dove and Lingood looked at each other, pale and blank. What should they do now? What else could be done? To stay were useless, or even indecent; to run away from the women in grief seemed even worse. They would be sick—fainting—dying perhaps.

"We ote to a-brote a drop o' brandy," said Roboshobery Dove.

He looked across the meadow beyond the fence, and saw something that gave him inspiration. It was a young woman in a print gown and a white sun-bonnet, carrying a baby. He had seen her of late working in the hayfields, and he had no doubt that she had come from the meadow beyond to take her mid-day rest and food alone, and to suckle her child. He had seen her do it before; and he judged — indeed, he had heard — the reason that made her remove herself and her child from the notice of her fellow-workers. He saw no present difficulty in that reason, but rather an opportunity; for this girl, in some degree cast out herself, might in fellow-feeling be ready to give aid and comfort to afflicted women whom the rest shunned. Dove went out at the gate and spoke to her.

"My gal," he said, "will yow come an' do a kindness to two women in deadly trouble?"

Dorcas Brooker looked up at him, nodded toward the cottage, and said: "There?"

"Ay, there. Their man be lost—killed in the wars; an' they be dolourin' at the news just brote. 'Twants a woman to tend 'em. God bless 'ee, my gal, if yow go, an' I 'll see yow doan't lose wages. Come to me for 'em—Roboshobery Dove, by the four-wont way."

She looked at her child, and then at the cottage. "Lost their man, d'ye say? 'Tis young Mart'n, as I 've heard. An' I know what be said of 'em."

"Hev yow never heard ill things said of others than they?"

"Ay, that I hev, Master Dove," the girl answered sadly. "I ben't afeared, an' if they want my help they shall hev it; though I doubt."

Dove gave her the newspaper. "The news be in there," he said, "word for word. Hide it about ye, an' let see if yow think well. An' if anythin' be needed send or come to me, or Master Lingood here."

Dorcas Brooker went through the gate, listened for a moment at the door, and knocked. There was no answer. Irresolute, she looked back at Dove. He nodded vehemently and motioned her to enter; and she lifted the latch and went in, as Dorrily had done.

"'Tis arl to be done," said Dove; and the two men turned their steps toward the village. Neither spoke much on the way, but Lingood was immersed in doubts and perplexities that the other guessed nothing of.

CHAPTER XIX

THE DEVIL AND HIS MASTER

INSIGNIFICANT to the rest of the world, in Hadleigh this was the greatest piece of news yet come from the war. Men stayed their work to consider it, and women talked of it over fences. The feeling in the matter was diverse. Some were sorry—all professed to be—for Jack Martin, who was dead and past pity; nobody ventured openly to express sympathy with his mother but Roboshobery Dove and Steve Lingood—perhaps because in their cases there was no woman to reproach either of them for it. For it was a fact that the women were, in general, as bitter as ever, or bitterer. It may have been partly that a secret and sneaking misgiving as to their treatment of Mrs. Martin and Dorrily Thorn in the past stimulated them now to keep each other in countenance by a sharper display of severity. Be that as it might, the women wasted no commiseration on the

witches at the black cottage. Mrs. Banham, in fact, did not conceal an exultation that made Roboshobery Dove shudder. Here was a judgment, she said, on the witch that had afflicted her children: her own child was taken at a stroke. If more proof had been needed of Mrs. Martin's guilt, here it was. Would such a blow have fallen so pat to time on an innocent woman? And the pious women of Hadleigh could not believe that it would.

Roboshobery Dove viewed this general hostility with dismay. He had not ventured to intrude on the bereaved women, but he knew that Dorcas Brooker had been with them, and that she had returned to help in household duties while Dorrily tended her aunt. So much being provided for, he set himself to consider what else might be done.

He was unpractised in excogitation, so that it cost him some hours of thought to arrive at the conclusion that any attempt to influence the feeling of the village toward Mrs. Martin must be made through Cunning Murrell. He was all unaware that Steve Lingood had already come to the same opinion, and had failed miserably in an attempt to apply it, or he might have been deterred from the course he now resolved on; which was to

put aside his wonted awe of the cunning man and make intercession.

Cunning Murrell came over the stile and into the lane in the early dark of that evening, with an extra large and heavy frail over his back—just such a frail as the Banhams had seen him carrying the night before. Now, the reason of his irritation on that occasion, and the reason of his stealth on this, was that the frail enveloped nothing but a tub of white brandy. It was a laborious and a gradual task for so puny a man, this bringing up the hill of forty such tubs, one at a time, with several journeys a night; though, of course, a strong carrier in the old days was wont to carry two at once. He had brought up more than thirty already, and stowed them neatly in his cottage; and his load had never been observed except that once. Forty were all he designed to bring. For with all his subtlety Cunning Murrell was resolved to deal strict justice to everybody—except perhaps the Queen, whom he had never thought of as a party to the transaction. There were a hundred tubs, and Golden Adams had agreed with Cloyse for half profits, after expenses had been paid. Now Cloyse wished to take the

lot, and had attempted to bribe Murrell to help him. The preliminary fee he had accepted; why not, since it was offered unconditionally? The promised fee he feared Cloyse would never pay, when he discovered what had been done. For, since Cloyse was reluctant to divide the money, Murrell was dividing the goods. Twenty tubs, he had decided, should be allowed Cloyse to pay expenses; half of the remaining eighty was forty, and these he had set about bringing away for Golden Adams's share—and his own. As the task proceeded and the tale of tubs disposed about the cottage grew larger, Murrell was conscious of a certain uneasiness, of an unfamiliar sort; for, with all his secret arts, he saw no way of escaping gaol if by any accident the hoard should be discovered. That would mean ruin—the one form of ruin that could terrify him. Money was useful, but he wanted no more of it than sufficed for present needs. His fame and dignity were everything. He was known and deferred to throughout his world—that is to say in all the farms and cottages of Essex and in many of those of Kent; and his curious distinction and power had endured a lifetime. Through all he had maintained the form of despising mere gain, and had put him-

self wholly above sordid matters of trade and bargain. And now, to be hustled off to Chelmsford gaol for dealing in smuggled brandy would be a disgrace beyond conception, and the end of all his authority. The apprehension oppressed him hourly, and he began to doubt his wisdom in meddling so far in the affair, and to suspect himself of yielding to an unworthy temptation. He was soiling his hands with a doubtful business, he feared, and he even began at last to experience a faint misgiving that perhaps something was due to the Queen in the matter after all. No doubt all these embarrassments would vanish once the danger was over and the tubs converted into money; but now the tubs were in his house, and the danger was present; and even Cunning Murrell could not always discriminate between the prickings of conscience and a sense of personal risk. In fine, for once Cunning Murrell was uneasy and a trifle timid.

He came over the stile, and was come some few yards up the lane when he was conscious, first, of the slow thump of Roboshobery Dove's wooden leg, and then of the man himself, scarce twenty yards away, and almost at Murrell's own door. Murrell hesitated, but the old sailor had seen him, and

came toward him with much respect and pulling of the forelock.

"Good evenin', Master Murr'll, sir — good evenin'," said Roboshobery deferentially; for he was resolved that if politeness would concilate the wise man he should have it. Wherefore also he swung round on his peg and made a snatch at the load on Murrell's back. "'Tis summat heavy yow hev there, Master Murr'll, sir," he said. "Let me take a lift of it."

Murrell turned and swung it away with such suddenness as almost to lose his balance. "No, no," he said hastily, "'tis right as it be, Master Dove."

But Roboshobery Dove was bent on civility. "Do'ee, Master Murr'll," he said, 'do'ee let me take a lift o't—yow be tired." And he followed the bulging frail with outstretched arms, while Murrell, mightily alarmed, turned and turned, so that they gyrated one about the other.

"Let be, I tell 'ee!" cried Murrell, now angry as well as frightened; for Dove had touched the burden once, and might have felt the tub. "I 'm nigh home now, an' I want no help."

Dove dropped his arms, fearing he had offended. "I beg your pardon, Master Murrell," he said humbly. "I den't guess yow wanted it kep'

private. Though I should ha' guessed, yow bein' true keeper o' so many folks' secrets."

"'Tis arl right, an' no secret," Murrell replied, not greatly reassured by the terms the other used. "'Tis but something I be feared o' breakin'." And he hastened to his door, Dove following, all unconscious of the agitation he was causing.

For Murrell remembered the old sailor's frequentings of the castle ruins with the telescope, and, apprehensive already, began to wonder if he had discovered anything. At the door he turned at bay, and asked, sharply: "Anything yow're wantin' o' me, Master Dove?"

"Well, yes," Dove answered. "I was thinkin' o' gettin' yow to 'tend to a little thing; for the good o' the village, so to putt it."

"Stay there then a minute." Murrell went in at the door and shut it behind him. Presently he opened it again, and let Dove in.

Roboshobery had never been in the room before, and now he stared about him mightily. Murrell glanced hastily round, fearful that some tub—for there were a dozen in that very room—might not be effectually concealed; and then, with something of his common authority, he said: 'Sit yow down, Master Dove, an' open your business."

"'Tis well knowed, Master Murr'll, sir," Roboshobery began, when the shiny hat was put away under his chair; "'tis well knowed as there be three witches in Hadleigh—ollis."

Cunning Murrell was relieved; it seemed that Dove was not come to persist in sly jokes about those tubs, after all. So he answered, "Ay, 'tis so."

"Yow hev said so yourself, Master Murr'll."

"Yes, I hev."

"An' 'tis no doubt they do ill in the village."

"No doubt at arl."

"There be a many evil things they do, doubtless," Roboshobery went on; for he had resolved to be very artful. "Doubtless many a thing as yow'd know, Master Murr'll, sir, an' even oathers 'ud know, but as I wouldn't hear of myself; 'cause when I 'm not in my garden, I stay much up at the Castle pickin' up little bits o' noos of a different sort." And he winked and nodded genially, for he felt that he was establishing friendly and confidential terms with the wise man.

Now what did *that* mean? Was it a hint? Murrell's doubts revived.

"Consekence it do seem to me that summat should be done," Roboshobery went on. "An' there can be no doubt but what yow be the onny

man in this warld equal to the job. Lord, Master Murr'll, how the devil must tremble afore yow!"

There was a cautious complacence in Murrell's face, but he said nothing.

"An' I hoad a wager he do get to arl sort o' tricks to spile your charms and oather business performances. Ay, that I lay."

"I be the devil's master, Master Dove," said Murrell, "an' tricks of his go for nothen with me."

"Ay, sarten to say. 'Tis a mighty poor chance he stand with yow, Master Murr'll, as be well knowed. But he do delude oathers, I count."

"No doubt he do."

"Ah, 'tis what I been thinkin', an' 'tis well to hev yow bear me out, Master Murr'll, sir." Robosho-bery Dove's strategy was developing. "Now putt the case, Master Murr'll, that the devil do get to deludin' some pusson. Putt it that the pusson be bewitched or under an ill star, or what not, an' that pusson comes to yow for your strong an' powerful help. 'Twould be needful, I take it, for that pusson to mention partic'lars, an' figures, and dates o' birth, an' one thing an' another for yow to make your calc'lations an' spells."

"Yes."

"An' in course, if them partic'lars an' figures an'

what not was arl wrong, they would spile your calc'lations and charms, an' putt 'em out o' reckonin'."

"Well, yes," Murrell admitted, as he could not help it. "Yes, no doubt that might be." But he began to suspect the drift of the argument.

"So that if that pusson was deluded by the devil to mistake his partic'lars, yow might come to nat'ral miscountin's, an' 'haps lay the mischief to a wrong party."

Murrell frowned and shuffled uneasily. "I say," he persisted, "the devil's tricks go for nothen with me."

"Ay 'tis a doubtless thing, Master Murr'll. But what I were goin' to say were this. There be three witches in Hadleigh, an' 'twould be well to find them arl. Now 'tis without doubt that yow, Master Murr'll, so larned as yow be, must hev some way o' findin' 'em arl alone—off your own bat, so to say it—an' without dependin' any way on the partic'lars give by oather people, which the devil like as not hev been playin' his darty tricks on."

"There be sarten curis arts that I might use," Cunning Murrell replied. "But why d'ye wish it?"

"I would offer, of course, to pay proper for the

calc'lations," Dove went on, ignoring the question for the moment, "if yow will accept of it; as is onny right and proper, for we read the labourer be worthy of his hire; though I mean no offence, Master Murr'll, sir, in sayin' labourer, an' would not think to putt yow among sich for a moment. An' 'haps, Master Murr'll, sir, yow will tell me what the charge would be, so that I may make arl right in adwance."

"Yow ha'n't told me yet," Murrell said quietly, "why 'tis yow want this done. Why should yow pay for the general good? You ben't bewitched yourself, be yow?"

"Lord bless 'ee, no, Master Murr'll—never better in my life. An' I *was* a-goin' to say, Master Murr'll, sir, that if, besides the proper payment, a little supply o' good brandy be acceptable—yow know, the oad sort"—here Dove winked and jerked his thumb backward, to Murrell's sudden alarm, in a direction not so far out from where some tubs were—"the oad sort, yow know—why yow shall hev it. Though 'haps yow 've arl you want. Still, there 't be, if yow like, an' welcome." And Roboshobery Dove winked and jerked his thumb again in the same direction.

It would seem that this man *must* know some-

thing. But Murrell kept his countenance and repeated: "Yow ha'n't told me yet, Master Dove, why yow want this done."

"Master Murr'll, sir!" Roboshobery exclaimed, suddenly catching the little man's hand and shaking it; "Master Murr'll, what I hev said will make plain the great respect I hoad yow in. We unnerstan' one anoather, Master Murr'll, don't us?" And he winked once more. "That bein' said, I don' mind tellin' yow 'tis mos'ly on account o' Mrs. Martin, poor young Jack Martin's mother."

"How on account of her?"

"I 'll tell 'ee—with arl respect, mind. 'Tis sarten truth that there be three witches in Hadleigh, for that yow hev found by your own conjurin's, Master Murr'll, an' putt forth. But when yow find Mrs. Martin a witch, 'tis on partic'lars give by Mrs. Banham, as the devil may hev deluded; as the devil *must* hev deluded, Master Murr'll; 'cause why? Here be young Jack Martin, Master Murr'll, killed like a brave man, a-fightin' the deadly Rooshans; an' I taught him his cutlass drill meself. Now, is it possible *his* mother be a witch? Why, stands to reason not! 'Tain't in natur! The devil hev muddled the partic'lars, Master Murr'll!"

Murrell heard this speech first with a frown, then

with a pursing of the lips, and last with something not unlike a twinkle. "An' how do this make with oather witches?" he asked.

"Plain enough, Master Murr'll. If yow find the true three 'twill make arl right, an' mistakes will be putt aside. An' now 'tis so plain as the devil must ha' muddled the partic'lars! Why, what can 'ee say arter what's happened? Her boy be killed, I tell 'ee, fightin' the Rooshans! An' I fit the French meself, when I was that high, damme!"

Roboshobery Dove in his excitement forgot all his awe of Cunning Murrell, raised his voice, and banged his fist on Cunning Murrell's table. The wise man shook his head and smiled gently, though with one more quick glance at where the tubs lay hid. "I doubt your reasonin', Master Dove," he said, "but I will see what I can do. I want no payment from yow now, at any rate."

"Yow will try 't, Master Murr'll, will 'ee?"

"I will consider of it, Master Dove, though 'twill make no difference to Mrs. Martin. I doubt anythin' can help her—even repentance be denied to witches."

"But I tell 'ee, Master Murr'll, sir, her boy——"

Murrell raised his hand. "That I hev heard a'ready, Master Dove, an' 'tis no need to say 't

again. I will consider of what other yow say; but as to Mrs. Martin, she will be well an' truly tried once more. Banham's girl be sore afflicted, an' the trial be to make again, an' soon. Then we shall see how near truth your fancy takes yow."

Dove scratched his head dubiously and asked: "Will't be done arl by yourself, Master Murr'll, without no other party's partic'lars?'

"Ay, it will. An' with the best preparation my curis an' powerful arts can give."

Roboshobery Dove thought for a moment, and decided that on the whole nothing better could be expected. If only the preliminaries were safeguarded he was confident that any test of Mrs. Martin, according to proper rule, must end in her triumphant acquittal. So he said: "Thank'ee, Master Murr'll, sir, thank 'ee. If yow 'll do't arl yourself 'twill end right, sarten to say. I don't know what Banham may be payin', an' 'tis not my business. But if there be any little extra performance as would make more sure, an' would come dearer, why I'm your man to pay't. We mus' take arl care, Master Murr'll, when there be danger to a poor widow in trouble."

"Yes, yes," Murrell answered testily, "arl care will be taken, o' course, and there be no need for

yow to interfere." He would have been still sharper of tongue were it not that the matter of the tubs still lay heavy on his mind. "An' tell me, Master Dove," he said, "what the noos may be yow gather at the Castle?"

"Noos? Why, the war. Prizes brote in to go to Chatham, an' that. An' the craft goin' up an' down."

"Nothen more?"

"Nothen more? Why no, nothen partic'lar; barrin' any little chance neighbour's business as might pass under my nose. But what might yow be thinkin' of?"

"O, nothen, nothen," Murrell answered with impatience. "Nothen at arl. 'Tis enough, Master Dove."

CHAPTER XX

A GALLANT OFFER

THE chief officer of the Leigh Coastguard disappeared behind the Castle hill, and presently could be seen striding down the lower slopes and over the marsh to his station.

He had received the news of Jack Martin's death that morning, and had lost no time in setting out for the black cottage. Martin had been one of his best and steadiest men, and the chief officer wished to do the family any service that was in his limited powers. He was a neglected lieutenant with a savage manner and one eye, and ere he had started out he had raked through his pockets and his desk, and had spent a quarter of an hour of calculation over the little heap of money thus collected: making careful count of the period to next pay-day, and resolving on the smallest sum that would carry him through to that occasion. This settled, the little heap had been separated into two,

whereof the larger had been rolled up in a piece of paper, and the other shovelled back into his breeches-pocket. For he knew that Jack Martin's half-pay, which his mother had been receiving, must stop now. He also knew that any other sum which might have been his would be long enough finding its way through a maze of forms and systems ere it reached Hadleigh; for he had had his own experiences of "the authorities."

For this last reason—perhaps in some small degree from his want of habit in expressing himself unaided by threats and oaths—he had said little at his visit; for he knew that it would have been foolish to suggest any hope of pension allowance, which was at the discretion of the Admiralty. But he offered to draw up the needful petition, and to back it with his own recommendation, little as that might avail. Also, since he had some idea of Mrs. Martin's unpopularity, he desired her to let him know if there were any effort to molest her—a thing he would see prevented.

Mrs. Martin had received him with instinctive respect for his uniform, but with a hazy dulness that seemed the sign of stupidity or indifference. Indeed, save for two intervals of relief in quiet tears, this had been her manner since Dorrily had carried the

news to her, and the girl had been more perplexed and troubled thereat than she would have been at any violent explosion of grief.

The chief officer had spoken to Dorrily alone after leaving the cottage, learning more of the attitude of the villagers, and repeating his offer of help. Then he had quickly stepped back into the keeping-room, dumped something down on the table, and stalked off, glaring arrogantly with his one eye, and frowning mightily.

Now he was growing a smaller spot on the green marsh, and Dorrily, worn and broken, turned to her aunt again. The girl's face was already thin, and her eyes were sunken. Her constant watching and anxiety had so kept her own grief pent up, and at the same time had so weakened her physically, that she was in dread of an utter breakdown, and did not dare to think.

At her appearance Mrs. Martin looked up with a strange stealthiness in her face. "He den't know, did he?" she asked.

Dorrily could not understand.

"You know," her aunt went on, with a touch of impatience. "He den't know I was a witch, did he?"

"No, deary," the girl answered, reassuringly,

smoothing back the hair from the thin face; "he wouldn't believe such wicked things of you."

The woman chuckled — an odd, displeasing chuckle, that affected her niece like a sudden chill. "No, no, he den't know. An' he'll bring the guard up if they try to swim me, Dorry." She chuckled again. "That," she said, "takes away the danger. 'Tis a wonnerful thing to be a witch an' hev the Queen's men at carl to keep yow safe when the folk come to swim 'ee!"

"Don't talk so, auntie dear," Dorrily pleaded, dismayed at this new fancy. "We know you be a true woman, an' no such hainish thing!"

But Mrs. Martin only said "Ah!" shook her head, and chuckled again. And presently, as Dorrily was at some small task in the back room, her aunt's voice, strained and changed and crazy, burst out:

In summer time, when flowers do spring,
An' birds sit on the tree—e—e——

With that the tuneless voice broke down, and soon, after a chuckle or two more, she was silent.

So she sat for a while, and at last fell asleep. Such sleep as she got now she took chiefly in the daytime. Dorrily closed the door softly, came into

the garden, and sat on a little bench that Jack had made, in a place where dog-rose and honeysuckle, growing at the meadow's edge, hung over the fence and made a nook. She bent forward and covered her face with her hands. Presently tears ran between her fingers and dropped on her apron, and soon there came sobs. Till now the full relief of weeping had been denied her, for her aunt needed constant care and watching; but now the solace was unchecked, and truly she had need of it. For the world was bad, bitter bad to Dorrily, and she was tried almost beyond her strength. To have been one of two bereaved women who could have mourned together and comforted one another would have been comparative happiness. To have been wholly alone would have been bad enough. But as she was, alone and not alone, alone to bear the pain of two, and to keep guard and service by the twisted mind that till lately she had looked to for government and support—this was a heavy load indeed.

In a little while the tears brought her a certain calmness, and she remembered that the world was not wholly cruel. Roboshobery Dove and Steve Lingood were kind enough, and the chief officer of the Leigh guard, who terrorised his men, and was

called a Tartar and a tyrant, had come of his own accord, though he had never spoken a word to either her aunt or herself before, had offered help, and had left money behind him on the table. Dorrily was doubtful about the money. She could not be ungrateful, and, indeed, they were poor enough, and the end of things in that respect she could not see. Yet she had a certain pride, and here again she felt her weakness and the lack of her aunt's responsibility.

Busy with her doubts, she had not heard his step; but now a shadow fell across the path, and she looked up to behold young Sim Cloyse.

He stood awkwardly enough before her, and there was in his face a mixture of smirking propitiation and sly confidence, ill covered by an assumption of sympathy, that was not agreeable to the eye. Yet Dorrily was in no state to consider him critically, and she saw nothing but the sympathy.

"Yow mustn't cry too much," said young Sim Cloyse. "Though 'tis but nat'ral, sarten to say."

Dorrily bent her head again.

"There be no carl to be ashamed o' cryin'," he went on encouragingly. "Though 'haps it be arl for the best."

This seemed a shameful thing to say, at first hearing; and yet—it was a pious sentiment, after all.

"I hope Mrs. Mart'n ben't very bad?"

"Yes, she be," Dorrily answered sorrowfully, "so bad that she frightens me."

"'Tis pity," Sim pursued, with elaborate sympathy. "An' folk ben't very kind to her, I hear tell."

"O they be cruel—bitter cruel," Dorrily exclaimed passionately. "They say ill things of her even now."

"Ay—that she be a witch, I do hear. 'Tis arl wrong, doubtless, but they do say't. Ben't yow afeard they might hurt her some day—try to swim her, or what not?"

"I 've thote it, an' so has she, but there 's been no offer to do such a thing yet. 'Twould be too wicked cruel, Master Cloyse, wouldn't it? You don't think they 'd do it, do you?"

Young Sim looked at the cottage roof, with a sidelong peep at the girl's urgent face. "I *hev* heared talk o' such things, down at Leigh," he said, "an' they be a rough lot, some on 'em. But there —'haps 'tis no more than talk."

Plainly Dorrily was distressed anew. Young Sim paused thoughtfully for a moment or two, and then said: "I 'm afeared she won't get no pension."

"But she ought," the girl protested, with a sinking at the heart. "We 're goin' to ask, an' she ought to have it."

He shook his head sagely. "No," he said, "there aren't no chance o' that now. None ever do, now; too many bein' killed. They do it in peace time arl right, so as to 'tice the men, but when they 've got 'em, an' gettin' 'em killed too quick, they can't afford it. 'Twould be a disappointment for you to build on that, an' I woo'n't like yow to be disappointed."

Dorrily's distress was aggravated. The chief officer had been doubtful and more than doubtful, and this disinterested corroboration seemed to settle it. Truly the prospect was grievous.

Young Sim Cloyse looked again at the cottage roof, meditatively. "'Tis gettin' a very oad place," he remarked presently, as though to himself. "An' it don't pay, that 's sarten."

Dorrily heard, and looked up.

"Still," Sim pursued, with the same abstraction, "'twould seem hard to pull it down."

"Pull down the cottage, Master Cloyse?" Dorrily asked. "You don't think o' that, do you?"

"O!" ejaculated young Sim, as though suddenly recalled to himself. "I were onny just a-thinkin'.

I don't want to pull 't down—no, not me. But my father, he be that obs'nit with a thing like that, yow can't think. 'Tis no good to me,' sez he, 'at that rent, an' repairs a-doin'. I could put up a noo place in brick, and make double on 't!'"

"O, Master Cloyse," the girl pleaded, "we shouldn't like to be turned out!"

"That's what I said. 'Twould be mighty hard,' sez I, 'to turn 'em out, with nowhere to go.' 'Can't help that,' sez my father. 'They bin there a long time,' sez I, 'an' got used to it.' 'Time they had a change, then,' sez he. 'Then,' sez I, 'they can't get no other place so cheap. 'No,' sez he, 'they can't, an' that's proof I ben't makin' enough out o' the place.' He's a keen 'un, is my father. 'But then,' sez I, 'they can't get no other place at arl, 'cause nobody'll have 'em, consekens o' bein' carled witches,' I sez. ''Haps not,' sez he, 'but that's oather folks' fault, not mine.' An' 'twere no manner o' use to argufy with him."

Dorrily broke down altogether. "O, Master Cloyse, 'tis cruel, cruel to be so with a poor woman!" And her face went down into her hands again.

Instantly young Sim Cloyse was on the seat beside her. "'Tis no need to take on so," he said, with all the tenderness his voice could summon,

putting a hand on her shoulder. "Yow can make arl right, easy enough."

There was a murmur between Dorrily's sobs, and young Sim went on. "'Tis arl the easiest thing out. Yow can hev better than fower pensions, an' any house you choose in Leigh or Hadleigh, or a noo 'un built; an' nobody durst lay a finger on your aunt, witch or not. T' oather is arl over now, as yow doan't need to be told, an' 'tis well to look to future."

Dorrily shrank, and let her hands fall from her tear-stained face.

"Come," said young Sim Cloyse, "I 'll say 't out. Will yow hev me? Here I be, ready, willin' an' lovin'. Say yow 'll hev me, an' arl your troubles be gone—arl Mrs. Martin's troubles wiped away for the rest of her time."

She was at the end of the seat now, pale of face and wild of eye. "O, Master Cloyse!" she cried, "how can 'ee? To talk o' such things now! Ha' ye no mercy?"

"Mercy?" young Sim repeated, with astonishment—for, indeed, he had used his finest tact. "Mercy? Why, 'tis arl mercy, an' affection's offerin', an' sich! Just think! Yow can save your aunt from starvin' an' bein' turned out o' doors

without a roof, an' bein' swum for a witch—an' 'haps drownded if she ben't one—an' make a lady o' yourself for life, just by sayin' 'yes' to me, as is so woundly fond o' ye. Why 'tis arl mercy! 'Tis yow that would hev no mercy on her if yow *den't* say 'yes.' But that ye will o' course—yow be too good a gal to sarve her bad, I know. Come now, the sooner yow say 't the sooner the troubles be done with."

"O, Master Cloyse, I can't say it! I can't say 't! I can't—not now, at any rate." Her face was hidden again, almost at her knees. "O, let me think, Master Cloyse—let me think of it alone! I be in such cruel trouble, Master Cloyse—such deadly cruel trouble! An' my head be so bad! Leave me alone, Master Cloyse, do 'ee—onny to think, Master Cloyse, for a day or two!"

To young Sim Cloyse this seemed useless delay, since the issue was so simple, and since there remained but one reasonable course for any girl not a fool. Still he supposed that some allowance must be made for the natural eccentricity of women, and so, since he was prepared with no more blandishments, he presently sheered off, with a promise to return in a day or two. It was but the delay of womanish vanity, he assured himself, and the desire not to make her consent seem too cheap. It was

unbusiness-like, perhaps, but he could afford to overlook that, since the result was so certain. And so young Sim Cloyse went over the foot-hills and marshes in the wake of the vanished chief officer, whistling aloud, and now and again winking and grinning self-congratulation on his uncommon cleverness and knowledge of human nature.

As for Dorrily, she was face to face with a means of ending her troubles that affrighted her more than the troubles themselves; and her affliction was the greater inasmuch as it seemed that her duty and gratitude to Jack's mother demanded the sacrifice. Her detestation of young Sim Cloyse she could never overcome; but it were a selfishness to let her inclinations govern her. For herself alone it would be better far to die; but there in the cottage was the poor broken-witted woman who had reared her—Jack's mother; and for her sake was there an alternative? Ere long tears failed Dorrily wholly, and a blank, almost calm, anguish filled her soul and dulled her faculties.

Soon after midday a perfunctory boy dawdled and divagated down the lane from the post-office, and at last climbed the bank and left a letter. It was Jack's last writing, finished three days before he went ashore for the last time.

CHAPTER XXI

MAN THE MASTER

THAT night Dorrily slept, in the sheer stupor of weariness; how long she could not guess. In the black of the night she was awakened by her aunt, who had crept close to her side, talking fast, and again chuckling horribly.

"Be a witch, Dorry, like me!" she was saying. "'Tis a fine thing—a dogged fine thing to be a witch, I tell 'ee!"

She held the girl fiercely, and her vehemence was dreadful. "Get to sleep, auntie dear," Dorrily said, "you be dreamin'!"

"No, Dorry gal, 'tis no dreamin'. 'Tis real an' fine. I be a witch, I tell 'ee!"

"There—there—rest you, deary, do," Dorrily pleaded. "You be a good woman, sad put on an' afflicted, but nothen wicked, I know!"

"I tell 'ee I be a witch, Dorry Thorn! Else why do I see 'em every night? See 'em an' talk

to 'em every night, John Martin an' Reuben Thorn your father? Ay, an' my boy John, too, that they tell me be dead!"

Dorrily trembled as she fondled the fevered head, and kissed the hot cheek.

"I see my man that I've lost for years, an' he kisses me an' lies at my side! He be just gone while I'm talkin'—but he'll come back, an' soon! An', Dorry, I hev letters—letters at daytime. There was one to-day, from my boy John at the wars. 'Tis double joy—the joy o' letters from the absent by day, an' by night they be absent no more. Be a witch like me, Dorry, an' see 'em! Death an' life mean nothen if you be a witch! My boy John be at the wars, fightin' as a man should, an' here at night to kiss his mother! Be a witch, Dorry, an' John'll kiss 'ee! Be a witch like me, with Queen's men to guard ye from the folk! Come! Come you to Castle Hill, where arl the witches be at night!"

She sprang up and pulled at Dorrily's arm, and so, raving and urging, made to leave the cottage. So she struggled and chattered for a while, till of a sudden she fell exhausted, and suffered herself to be put quietly into bed again, where she slept soundly. And in the morning

she was quiet still, and, it would seem, even placidly happy. Dorrily left her to rest the early hours in bed, and rose, hollow-eyed, to face the day.

Would young Sim Cloyse come again to-day? She half expected it. Weary and distraught, she was wholly incapable of giving his offer anything like definite consideration; but unconsciously at the back of her mind the resolve was growing up to entreat a little respite, to pray at least for a little more time, if only in regard to common decency and the memory of the dead; with a feeling that at the end of all there could be nothing but the piteous, inevitable surrender, the sacrifice she must make for the sake of Jack's mother.

But that day young Sim Cloyse was made suddenly busy with other things. For in the night a note, in Cunning Murrell's crabbed little writing, had been pushed under old Sim Cloyse's door. It told that respectable tradesman that his "property" lay now wholly at his disposal, and might be removed where he pleased and when he chose; with a hint that the next would be the last wholly moonless night of the month. So that the morning found both young Sim and old Sim

busy and ambulant in the villages a little way in from the shore, enlisting and giving appointment to a gang of men who were willing to sacrifice a night's rest, carry tubs without unnecessary noise, and hold their tongues about it, for very excellent pay and plenty of drink at the end of the job. And Dorrily was left unmolested.

Roboshobery Dove was much exercised in mind, being very willing, and indeed anxious, to find how they fared at the black cottage, but being in just as much restrained by a reluctance to intrude, a reluctance he would never have felt in the case of any male friend whom he might have helped. Lingood, too, was under a similar constraint, with an added element which gave his position a delicacy only palpable to his instinct, and never clear or tangible in his thoughts. Though he began to feel that plain duty demanded an inquiry or approach of some sort. Dorcas Brooker had done what she could, and Dorrily had been grateful to her ; but she would not keep her long. So this morning Roboshobery Dove made fidgety reconnaisances about the cottage, lurking behind fences and hedges and in ditches—a wooden leg is an embarrassment in all lurkings

about ditches—and looking from afar through his telescope. At last, as he took one such peep, Dorrily came out, and turned her face full toward him. It was so pale, so drawn, so black and haggard about the eyes, so piteously broken-spirited in expression, that the old man's arms dropped to his sides, and he recoiled as if from a blow between the eyes. For a moment he stood, staring at the distant cottage, in whose garden he could see now only a patch of print gown where Dorrily stood, and then he shut the telescope and hurried off to Lingood's forge.

A change in the girl he had looked for, naturally; but this was so great that it seemed to him beyond what could be occasioned by the grief of bereavement, however sharp. He could make no better guess than to suppose some sort of privation. "Steve," he said, "she be wasted to a ghost. 'Tis like as not they're starvin'."

Steve Lingood spent no more time in fancies. He dropped his hammer and washed himself, and in ten minutes he was climbing the bank to the cottage, alone; while Roboshobery awaited him afar off.

Dorrily Thorn, put in fear by the sound of a man's footstep, first looked from the window, and

then met Lingood at the door. He, too, was shocked to see the girl so careworn; but he went abruptly to the business in hand.

"If I could ha' sent a woman," he said, "I would. But I couldn't, an' 'tis no time for standin' off. You be in sad trouble—'haps worse than I guess—an' I 'm here to help 'ee, to my last kick, or my last penny, as 't may be. Now I know you 're in some oather trouble, beside what I know of. Tell me."

He spoke sharply, in the manner of a man who commands and insists, and the fact gave Dorrily a curious relief, such as no gentle expressions of condolence could have caused; for the mere sound of command seemed to lift a little the weight of doubt and responsibility that was beyond her strength. She felt less embarrassment in telling her troubles to Lingood than might be supposed, because she had always looked on him as something of an elderly man. True, he was but twenty-eight, and she was twenty; but her habit of mind dated from the time when she was thirteen and he was twenty-one, big and tall, and, in her childish eyes, a man within view of middle age.

"Tell me," demanded Steve Lingood.

She closed the door behind her and came out into the garden, in a part removed from the open bedroom window. "She 's upstairs," she explained, "and talking near may disturb her."

"Tell me," the smith repeated. "Is 't money?"

Dorrily shook her head. "No, Master Lingood," she said, mournfully enough, "'tis not money—at any rate for the present."

"Then what?"

She looked up at his face, then down on the ground, and at last fixed her eyes on the bushes visible to the side of him. Somehow, now, it seemed harder to talk of the urgent, the pressing trouble than she had thought. "Poor aunt," she said at length, "be very bad."

"Ill? Sick?"

"Well enough in health, but strange in the head with her troubles, an' helpless as a child. An' then—Master Lingood, folk be so cruel to us!"

"Damn 'em!" Lingood burst out with a stamp. "What ha' they done?"

"'Tis not that they 've done much but talk, though that be bad enough. But she be terrified they might swim her—the Leigh chaps have talked of it, I 'm told. An'—O, Master Lingood, arl sorrows come at once! 'Tis said there can

be no pension for her, an' Master Cloyse do talk o' pullin' down the cottage an' turnin' her out with nowhere to go. An' arl is on me, Master Lingood, an' it be too much for a poor girl!"

Lingood clenched his jaw, fidgeted his feet, shut and opened his fists. The strain was hard to bear.

"'Tis arl on me, Master Lingood, and which way to turn I can't tell, an' I be sick an' ill with it. An'—an' there be only one way I can see."

"What way?"

Dorrily's wan cheeks flushed. "There be somebody wantin' to marry me," she said.

Lingood caught a quick breath. Then, as well as something in his throat would let him, he asked: "What—now? Since . . . ?"

Dorrily nodded. She was pale again now, paler than ever.

Lingood was pale, too, though she did not look up to see it. "Well," he said slowly, and with some touch of bitterness in his voice; "so you think that be the way then? Maybe——"

She lifted her eyes with so much in them of anguish and reproach that he stopped. "O, 'tis terrible, Master Lingood," she cried, "an' I don't like him! But I must do't, mustn't I?"

Lingood had never before found speech so hard and so slow. "I don't see," he said. "Why?"

"What can I do? O, Master Lingood, I hate him; but 'tis keep and shelter for her, an' protection, an' 'haps then his father 'll let her stay here—at least till she mends—an'——"

"His father?"

Dorrily nodded quickly, with a faint and momentary flush. "Tis young Sim Cloyse," she said quietly. And then, a little at a time, with the fewer tears because of the desperate resignation that had grown upon her, she told the story of yesterday's interview. "'Tis bad for me—bitter bad, Master Lingood," she concluded, simply and sadly; "an' I sicken to think of it. But I must, mustn't I?"

Lingood could bear it little longer. Heart and brain alike seemed bursting. "Den't you—think——" he gasped; "Den't you—think—o' friends—that might help 'ee?"

"O, Master Lingood, you're kind—kind friends—you an' Master Dove; an' the chief officer's a good gentleman to us. But what can 'ee do more than ye have? You be kind—over kind; but this—these things ye can't help; 'tis for me only. An' I must, Master Lingood, I must!"

"Ye shan't!" Lingood burst out, for he could hold it no more. "Ye shan't! I won't see 't—can't! Dorrily Thorn, I love 'ee myself—God forgive me for sayin' it at such a time! But true 'tis, an' now you know't. Unnerstand!"—he steadied himself sharply before the wondering gaze—"unnerstand! I 'm not askin' ye. I wouldn't treat ye so at this time. I leave that. But the other you shall not do—I will see no such evil thing!"

Dorrily could only gaze and wonder. But her load was lightening—lightening at every word. This strong man was taking her doubts on himself, and resolving them.

"Now," the smith went on, "let us hev no mistake. Young Sim Cloyse hev asked you to marry him, an' you hate to think of't. Now, be that the full truth, an' not a thote kep' back?"

It was an injury to doubt her, and the tone of her answer said as much.

"An' Mrs. Martin don't know?"

"No—nothen. I doubt if she 'd understand."

"Very well. I will take your answer to Sim Cloyse. Unless you 'd rather tell him yourself?"

Dorrily shook her head. Truly she shrank from another experience of young Sim's courtship.

"'Tis settled, then, an' I'll see you're troubled no more. For what I said about myself—'tis said now an' can't be unsaid, though 'twas forced from me. But you may be easy as to that, too; for never again will I speak of it, unless some time, when your trouble be nothen but a thing remembered, you make it known to me I may: unless you wear a rose in your hair again, as I saw you last year at Bennett's harvestin'."

She stood alone in the garden, and Steve Lingood was tramping up the lane. It seemed a dream—a dream that put all thought to rout, though a dream that had its under-mutter of doubt and sorrow. There went Stephen Lingood, striding up the lane, till the steps were heard no more; and here stood she in a whirl of amaze, though incongruously calm—even slow of understanding.

"Dorrily Thorn, I love 'ee myself! . . . A rose —a rose in your hair again." . . .

CHAPTER XXII

THE BOTTLE AGAIN

ROBOSHOBERY DOVE learned all of Lingood's talk with Dorrily that the smith chose to tell him, and was disappointed when it turned out that young Sim Cloyse was not to be found that day; for he had hoped for a little fun. But what Lingood told him of Mrs. Martin's state resolved him to make occasion to speak to Cunning Murrell again.

Meanwhile, Murrell had been at odds with his erudition. The return and aggravation of Em Banham's trouble had perplexed him: to say nothing of the other visitations on the house of Banham. It was natural to suppose that Mrs. Martin was still the evil influence, though by all the rules of his art her power over Em Banham, at least, should have been dissipated by the bursting of the witch-bottle.

In the privacy of his dwelling he gave certain

hours to trials and inquisitions of divers sorts. First he cast a horoscope. He took a sheet of paper, and on it he drew a figure like a small game of hopscotch. In the central square he wrote Em Banham's name, and the date of her birth; and then, aided by a dog's-eared nautical almanack, he proceeded to bespeckle the outlying lines with figures and symbols, till the whole figure was cast, and all the twelve houses of the heavens were tenanted in the fitting manner. This done, he made a column of notes, with similar symbols, beneath; and scratched his head vehemently.

After some minutes he began another horoscope, this time writing in the middle the date of Em Banham's first seizure; and, completing the illumination in the same manner as the first, fell to scratching his head again. Then he made a third, with the date of the affliction of Banham's horse as the central fact. If he had not been ignorant of the old sow's birthday he might have added a fourth.

Cunning Murrell frowned, and gnawed the feather end of his pen. Then he took another sheet of paper, and began a trial by geomancy. He screwed up his eyes, and made many rows of strokes. Then he counted the strokes, and placed

opposite the end of each row one or two noughts, till the noughts could be separated into four symmetrical figures. Counting this way and that among the noughts, he* built up other similar groups, till at last there were fifteen, the final three being placed apart, as judge, right witness, and left witness. Then nothing remained but to pull out a little manuscript book from the drawer, look out in its pages the evidence of the witnesses and the decision of the judge, fall again to scratching the head, and begin a fresh sheet of paper with a new row of strokes.

In a little while half a dozen groups of judges and witnesses littered the table, and Cunning Murrell glared blankly from one to another. He had never devoted so many tests to one matter before, nor found a case quite so perplexing. He reached a Bible from a shelf, plunged his finger between the leaves at random, stared at the text next the finger, and tried again. And finished up with another horoscope, with Mrs. Martin's name in the middle, and the date and place of her birth turned out from among the heap of notes wherein he had noted every birthday he could hear of since first he was an adept.

Cunning Murrell got on his feet and walked

about the little room, twining his fingers in his white hair; and when he encountered his chair on the way he kicked it over, and saluted Ann Pett, who peeped in because of the noise, with angry objurgation. For it was the amazing fact that not one of his subtle operations produced a result in any way concordant with the triumphant issue of the bottle-bursting experiment. More, they disagreed among themselves in a most irregular manner. Plainly some disturbing element must be at work; and since he was wholly unaided, and the sciences were infallible, the disturbing element must be at work on himself. It was his faith that none but a man of guiltless life might practise his arts with effect; and he wondered what lapse he had made that should place him, the devil's master, within reach of evil influence; till after reflection he felt some doubt of the strict morality of smuggling.

But he devoted himself with the more care to preparations for the proper use of the second bottle. This, at any rate, should operate so as to leave no doubt, and at the least to break the evil spell that hung over the Banhams. He chose the bottle with care from the three that Lingood had made, and purified it with many washings in

curious liquids, and last by fire; having written the conjuration for the day on paper, and inserted it so that it might be consumed in the interior He scratched pentacles and other signs on it—all strictly according to day and hour—with a steel point. And everything his arts suggested having been done, he carried the bottle to Banham's, with his frail and his herbs.

The evening was dark. It was, as Murrell had reminded Cloyse, a moonless night, though stars were many and bright. The village was very quiet, for almost everybody was already long in bed. But the Banhams were waiting anxiously in the muddled keeping-room, just as they had been waiting for the other trial a few weeks back; and the crowd of little Banhams pushed and contended on the stairs.

Preparations were made as before, even so far as the driving upstairs of the little Banhams, and the shutting of the stair-foot door on them. But in the kitchen Murrell shut himself alone for a few minutes, with the pins and needles and the finger nails and the rest. For with them also he had resolved to take uncommon precautions.

"Now, neighbours," said Murrell, as he emerged from the kitchen, screwing down the stopper, "to-night I make strong war on the evil powers

that do oppress this house, and more particular your darter. Well will yow remember that I did it before, though the relief, by a strange happenin', did not last as it should. That do but prove how mighty and powerful were the spells agen yow. This time I hev made such preparations as nothen can withstand. I hev never before made so sarten and so sure with every conjuration an' word o' power known to my strong an' lawful arts. We go now to the bake-hus agen, an' once more I tell 'ee there mus' be no word spoke. Agen I tell 'ee, the sore pain an' anguish that will be putt upon the hellish witch may draw that witch in agony unto us. If she doan't come, an' 'tis common they doan't, the greater will be the pain an' the anguish; but if she do, as well she may, so powerful as be my spells, agen I tell 'ee, not a word. No matter which she may speak to or what she may say to cause the spell to break, not one mus' answer, or her punishment stops that instant. Joseph Banham, bring yow the candle."

Em, who to-day had been chiefly drowsy and peevish, now broke out: "Mother, I woan't be near the bake-hus door, for I'll be deadly feared when Mrs. Mart'n do come in. I woan't go unless yow arl do sit atween! I woan't!"

"'Tis arl right, deary," her mother answered, coaxing her. "Us will arl go atween if yow want. She den't hurt ye before, an' 'tis sarten she cain't now. Come then, an' us'll soon see ye cured for good."

Em rose with a sulky shake, and the party turned to the back door. "Now," said Murrell, with his hand on the latch, "not anoather word."

They passed out in procession, Murrell, Mrs. Banham, Em, Mag, Dick, and last, and least in importance, except for the rushlight he carried, Banham himself. Once they were clear, the stair-foot door opened, and all the little Banhams came down into the keeping-room and the kitchen to listen. Though they dared go no farther.

The bake-house was warm, and the fire glowed. Murrell motioned the party to their places, sending Em and her mother to the far side, away from the entry, and keeping the rest, as well as possible, from the direct front of the oven door. This settled, he raked the fire, and flung on more wood. And when the flames rose and sang aloud, he flung in the bottle, shut the latch, and crouched with the others.

For a while there was gaping silence, and six

staring faces distorted with shadow. Breaths were held, and every eye was fixed on the oven door. Then there arose within the fire the faint singing noise that they had heard before—the sound that had then told Steve Lingood of a tiny vent at the stopper of the bottle. But this time the smith had taken good care that the vent should be there, and that it should be a vent sufficient to make a serious explosion unlikely. So that now the singing noise grew louder as they waited, and still louder.

Every ear was strained to catch any new sound, but for a while there was nowhere anything but the loud whistle from the bottle; and they waited still. Then, sharp and clear, came the click of the gate without, just as it had done before; and straightway every staring face turned to its neighbour, and Em caught fast hold of her mother.

The gate slammed to; and then came the footfalls. For a moment they stopped, near the front of the house; and then they were heard again, nearer, and growing louder as they came. . . . Slowly nearer, and gradually louder, till they stopped at the bakehouse door; and the latch rose with a sudden click that sent up each heart with a jump.

Every eye was on the door, and Em trembled,

gripping her mother with all her strength. Cunning Murrell raised his hand to keep the silence unbroken, and turned as the door opened. There on the threshold stood a thin, worn, rusty woman. She put her pale face forward, and looked about the bakehouse. And she was Ann Pett.

"Yow be wanted," said Ann Pett to her father. "Can yow come?"

Cunning Murrell had been stooping, but now he went backward and sat, his back against the brick pier of the oven, and his face a blanker figure of amazement than any other in that place. The Banhams squeezed their lips together, and bulged their eyes like hobgoblins. Mrs. Banham clapped her hand to Em's mouth.

"Yow be wanted, I say," repeated Ann Pett.

A flush of rage crossed Murrell's face. "Ann Pett!" he screamed, "what ha' yow been at?"

Ann Pett was all vacant incomprehension, but a sense of injustice stirred Banham to unwonted ire. "Yow 've stopped her punishment!" he cried indignantly, pointing with his finger in Murrell's face. "I woan't pay a farden! 'Taren't fair, Master Murr'll! Yow 've bruck the spell 'cause she be your darter!"

Cunning Murrell sprang to his feet, and seized

Ann Pett by the wrist. "What ha' ye been at, woman?" he screamed again.

An angry clamour filled the bakehouse, and Em set up a run of horrible shrieks. And in the midst of it all the bottle burst.

It was not a great explosion, this time, and it did not blow off the oven door. The whistle ended with a loud thud, and dust, smoke, and a great stink burst out at the cracks. But it checked the hubbub for a moment, and while attention was given to the oven Murrell was gone.

CHAPTER XXIII

A FAULT PURGED

CUNNING MURRELL dragged the unhappy Ann Pett home, gripping her by the wrist, and hissing fierce reproach as he went. She, terrified and bewildered, could but gasp and protest incoherently. He pushed her through the cottage door, shut and buttoned it behind him, and flung her down before him.

"Down, woman, on your knees!" he cried, "an' confess what devil's work yow ha' been at! Yow, my own child, of arl the world! What ha' ye done, witch?"

"I den't—I ben't—I toad yow. . . . Let my arm alowan!"

"What ha' ye done?"

"I tell 'ee yow be wanted—Master Dove—he kim here—yow'll break my arm!"

"Master Dove? Where be Master Dove?"

"O, I dunno! He kim here—let go my arm, do

'ee!—he kim here an' arksed for 'ee. An' he said he'd be back agen, an' would I find an' tell 'ee. An' I goed to Banham's, an' young Bobby toad me you were in the bake-hus. An' yow 'll break my arm, I tell 'ee!"

Murrell let the wrist drop, and glared at her, hard and gloomy. "Things hev been wrong with me o' late," he said, "an' my curis arts an' calc'lations hev failed o' their end; 'twere plain to me that some evil influence were near—I den't judge it so near as my own darter. If yow hev meddled in devilish things, 'twere a sorrow to yow that ever yow were born! Darter or not, there shall be no mercy for 'ee!"

"I ha'n't done nothen! I be innocent as—as—as that!" Ann Pett protested tearfully, pointing at the nearest article of furniture, which was the big chest of books and papers.

"That I will try, Ann Pett," said Murrell sternly. "Give of your hair!"

He seized the miserable wisp of mouse-grey hair that was twisted in a small knot behind her head, pulled it loose, and snipped off a lock with scissors from the mantelpiece. This done, he singed some of the hair at the candle-flame, and put it, with the rest, into a shallow pot with water.

For some little while he watched it. Then he turned and said: "The hair trial do favour yow, an' at anoather time I would carl 't enough. But I must try yow further. Can 'ee say the Lord's Prayer? Keep 'ee kneelin'."

By this time a little recovered, though agitated still, Ann Pett managed to repeat the whole prayer without omission, a feat notoriously impossible for any witch; and Murrell was in some way appeased. He made still another test, however, in which a bible took part; and then told his daughter to get off her knees.

"'Tis plain," he said, more mildly, "that the fault be not with yow. But it stand plainer than ever that there *be* a fault, an' I fear 'tis my own. I have siled my hands with a matter o' low honour, or no honour at arl, an' my virtue be gone out o' me till I mend it. Ann Pett! Come yow now an' help me!"

He rose and opened the door. Without all was dark and silent, and, after a look each way, he returned and seized a tub where it was hidden behind bunches of herbs. "Take yow anoather," he commanded Ann Pett, "an' bring 't after me to the stile."

He carried the tub before him, hooking his

fingers at each end. Carried thus it was no slight load for a man of his smallness and age, and it impeded his legs. But he reached the stile quickly enough, set the tub on the upper step on the farther side, climbed over, and put it in the ditch. Then he took the second tub that Ann Pett had brought after him, and bestowed that with the first; and so began the purification of his house.

CHAPTER XXIV

IN THE QUEEN'S NAME

THE day passed quietly with Dorrily Thorn after Lingood had gone, and Mrs. Martin, much the better for resting in her bed, was so tranquil and so reasonable that her outburst of the night would almost seem to have been nothing but an impossible nightmare. And at dark she went to bed quietly again, and slept soundly.

Dorrily also slept, though uneasily, and with an apprehension of being awakened again. And, indeed, she was awakened, though not in the same way as before. She grew vaguely aware that the place beside her was vacant, and sitting up, she saw her aunt at the window, of which the casement stood wide open. Dorrily slipped out of bed and came to her aunt's side.

"Hush!" The woman raised her hand and whispered. "Look over the lane, Dorry, to the hollow behind Castle Hill. D' ye see 'em?"

It was a dark night, and at first Dorrily was disposed to suspect some delusion. But she looked intently, and presently could distinctly make out a group of men—perhaps half a dozen—very quiet, and, it would seem, waiting. As she looked she saw another shadowy figure join them from the rising meadow beyond, and there was still another coming. And now—for there was no wind—she could just catch the mutter of quiet talk among them.

The village was deep in sleep long ago. Why should these men collect just here at this time of night? For a moment a vague fear seized Dorrily that perhaps they were come to maltreat the poor woman by her side.

"See 'em?" Sarah Martin whispered in her ear, "What be they chaps out for at this bull's-noon time? 'Tis for no good, I count."

They watched a few seconds more, and saw another man come over the meadow. Then Mrs. Martin rose to her feet.

"I be going out," she said, "by the back." And she began to hurry on some of her clothes.

Whether or not to restrain her Dorrily hardly knew. "Goin' where?" she whispered.

"Goin' to the guard. Whatever it be 'tis well

they should know." Sarah Martin spoke calmly and rationally, and with a clearer note of intelligence than Dorrily had heard in her voice for weeks. She, too, began to dress. At any rate she must not let her aunt go out alone. And after all if this were a hostile crowd nothing nearer than the guard could save them.

It was but a matter of seconds to clothe themselves sufficiently for the needs of the warm summer night, and soon the back door was shut quietly behind them. Mrs. Martin led with a silence and a discretion that surprised Dorrily, used of late to nurse and humour her aunt almost as she would a child. She picked a way that was everywhere invisible from the lane, skirted the hills among she broken coppice, and only came into the open beyond sight of the lane end among the broken foot-hills.

Hadleigh Castle stood high on the left, each tower a mere black bulk among the stars; and soon it was behind them. Sarah Martin knew the patrols of old, and was making for the nearest man, and at such a swift walk that Dorrily had a difficulty in keeping near her. Once she stopped and listened, and though to Dorrily the night seemed void of human sound, her aunt whispered that

she could hear the footsteps of more than one man, and that it meant that the chief officer was visiting guard.

They hurried on breathlessly. It was long since Sarah Martin had had occasion to traverse these parts, even by day, yet she took her way among quags and hillocks without a mistake, and without a pause to look for the way. Presently they came on a made path, raised a little from the marsh, and here they stayed again to listen. The sound of steps was distinct and near now, and Mrs. Martin ran along the path, calling aloud: "Guard! guard!" with Dorrily at her heels.

"Here!" cried the man, coming to meet them. "What is it?"

"Hev the chief officer been here?"

"Why, 'tis Mrs. Martin!" the man said, peering into her face. "Ay, the chief hev just left. Gone Leigh way. D'ye want him?"

"Ay, quick, an' no time to waste. Carl him."

The coastguardsman blew two low notes on his whistle, and began walking sharply along the path, the women keeping by his side. Soon the chief officer was heard returning, and a man with him.

"Well, well?" said the officer sharply, "what now?"

"There be a gang o' men gatherin', sir, at back

o' Castle Hill," said Mrs. Martin. "What they be arter I ben't sure of, but I should guess it be a run. I doan't think it be to hurt me this time, nor my niece. But there be the men, sir, an' 'tis right yow should know."

"How many?"

"Eight or nine, an' more comin'. Very quiet arl of 'em, an' waitin', seemin'ly, when we left."

"Come," said the officer, "quick, the two of you! And no row, mind!"

"Shall I burn a flare, sir?" one man asked.

"Burn your fat head!" snapped the one-eyed chief officer. "Up on the hill, perhaps. What 's the good of a flare down here, except to scare them off? Get ahead, you skrimshanked barbers, and shut your jaw!"

They were hurrying back by the way the women had come, and Mrs. Martin was keeping near them, with Dorrily following as best she might. A large run of smuggled goods had not been known in these parts for years; but the chief officer knew that Mrs. Martin had seen more of coastguard work than most coastguardsmen—certainly more than any of them he had command of now. And, as he reasoned, a silent gang of men did not assemble near the coast at midnight to play at marbles.

CHAPTER XXV

A WAKEFUL NIGHT

NOW Roboshobery Dove, when he had been told that Murrell was out, but expected back, had promised to come again. He had gone back to the Castle Inn, but found it closed for the night. So he kept on his way through the village to his own house. Here he thought to fill an interval with a pipe and a glass; which indulgences, with the lateness of the hour, caused him to fall asleep in his chair. He never knew precisely how long he slept, but when he woke his long clay pipe was lying on the floor in five pieces, and the candle was smoking and spluttering in its socket.

He rose hastily, took his hard glazed hat, and went out. Plainly it was very late, but he had promised to call again, and perhaps Cunning Murrell, night-bird as he was, was waiting for him. So Roboshobery Dove hastened by what he judged

a short cut. That is to say, instead of going by the village street—wherein, indeed, he feared the familiar sound of his wooden leg at that hour might raise gossip—he took the paths that led behind the gardens.

The ways were narrow and crooked, and they made amazing quirks and circuits round hoppits, by pigsties, and behind cowhouses. But Roboshobery Dove could have found his way blindfold, and he went over the soft ashes that made the surface without conscious thought of a turn or an angle ; and at last emerged in the lane a little below the cottages and almost opposite the stile.

He heard a step, which stopped suddenly ; and peering through the dark he perceived the form of Murrell, and behind him, more distinct, that of Ann Pett in her print gown. Murrell saw Dove too, but it was too late. He had had in mind that the old sailor was to return, and had kept open eyes and ears for him, carefully peeping before venturing out with a tub, and listening for his step in the village street. But as time went on, and as the tubs, two at a time, made a higher and higher pile in the ditch, Murrell grew easier, supposing that Dove must have postponed his visit till to-morrow.

And now, when the house was rid of almost all the smuggled liquor, on a sudden Roboshobery Dove came silently from the direction opposite that he might be expected by, and almost ran into him as he carried one of the barrels. For a moment Murrell thought of turning back; but it was too far, and with the tub he could not run. He stopped, and Roboshobery Dove came up.

"Good evenin', Master Murr'll, sir," said Roboshobery. "'Tis wonnerful late for a wisit, but—hullo! Axcuse me, but . . . Why 'tis!" He dropped his voice suddenly. . . . "'Tis a tub! Well I 'm——"

For once Cunning Murrell had not a word to say. He took a step forward, and another step back, hugging the unlucky tub before him in the manner of a muff. Roboshobery Dove, who had bent to inspect it, rose erect with many chuckles. "Well, there!" he said. "To think of 't!" and he chuckled again. "Well, I den't think—why bless 'ee, Master Murr'll, sir, this ben't one o' the things yow was 'feared o' breakin' t'other night, be 't? In the frail basket, hey? Ha! ha! But 'tis arl right—yow den't need to be gastered. 'Tis many a hundred sich I 've had in my time, sarten to say. Come, I 'll give 'ee a hand. Lord love 'ee, I den't think ever to handle one agen, that I den't, barrin' one

or two o' my own, kep' snug. An' was onny sayin' a while ago how easy a run would be now—but I den't think 'twould be yow as would make 't, that I den't! Ha! ha! Come, give us a hoad. Where are ye puttin' em? Fetch anoather."

"Master Dove," protested Murrell, with such dignity as was consistent with hanging to the tub, which Roboshobery had seized. "Yow be mistaken. I be no smuggler, though 't may seem so. This liquor ben't mine—none of it, not now—an' I repent ever touchin' it. I am but puttin' it out o' my house, where 't should never hev come. Touchin' pitch I hev been defiled, an' my lawful arts hev been undone."

"Well," said Dove, who was by no means convinced, "I dunno 'bout arl that; an' as to pitch, 'tis a useful 'nough thing in its place, though I 'd raythер hev a barr'l o' this stuff jus' now. I onny offered to give y' a hand."

Since Dove would not go he might well help to shorten the job. "There are but fower or five left now," Murrell answered, "an' if yow 'll go back with Ann Pett you can help bring 'em, an' thank'ee kindly. I 'll stow these."

So Dove went toward the cottage with the woman, and Murrell added the two tubs to the pile.

The cunning man found Dove's presence doubly awkward, for there might be other visitors, though he did not expect them just yet. Golden Adams had been mightily tickled by Murrell's arrangements for doing justice between old Sim Cloyse and himself, and had sworn not to deny himself the pleasure of witnessing their working out; though he had promised the cunning man that the pistols should not go with him. He was to observe Cloyse's doings from a place of concealment, and he might, if he pleased, follow him, when, as was regarded certain, he would come to knock up Murrell and report that forty of the tubs were missing.

Roboshobery Dove stumped out sturdily with a tub on each shoulder, and Ann Pett behind him; and with one more journey to the cottage brought out the last two.

"That be arl, so your darter tell me," Roboshobery remarked, leaning on the stile. "But that be a queer place to putt 'em!"

"I care not where they go, Master Dove," Murrell replied, with something of his common self-possession; for he was relieved at seeing the job done. "I care not where they go, so as they go out o' my house. I might ha' putt 'em in the hoss-road or let the officers take 'em, 'stead o' toilin' an'

draggin' to putt 'em behind a hedge in a field nobody goes near."

"'Tis a quiet field enough," replied Dove, to whom the whole proceeding was incomprehensible; "but why putt 'em in a field at arl?"

"Master Dove, I hev told yow, though in your way o' thinkin' yow may not see't. I hev siled my hands with an evil traffic, and now that I see my hainish error I wash my hands of it, an' I putt the thing from me." Cunning Murrell turned toward his cottage. "Come away, Master Dove, from the place," he said, "an' if yow hev aught to say to me, say't quickly, for 'tis late; or, better still, leave it till to-morrow."

"Why, Master Murr'll, sir," Dove answered, walking at his side, "what I did hev in my mind was to speak agen to yow o' Mrs. Martin an' her niece."

"An' what o' them?" Murrell's face was invisible in the dusk, or Roboshobery Dove would have seen that he frowned and screwed his lips. The evening's adventures had made him touchy.

"Why, they be in very bad trouble, as yow know, an' I thought to ask if yow'd made such trial as yow spoke of, arl by yourself, without any oather party's partic'lars."

Cunning Murrell was in an unaccustomed and

unpleasant position. He could not afford to be angry, for Roboshobery Dove was witness to his connection with the smuggled tubs, and in that respect might be as dangerous as if they still lay concealed in his cottage. On the other hand, the story of the burning of the witch-bottle at Banham's would be all over the village in the morning, and it were useless to attempt to conceal it. He saw that he must make some concession if he were to save his dignity at all. So he answered: "Yes, I hev."

"Ah!" said Dove, eagerly, "an' 'tis right, aren't it? Yow've found 'tis anoather witch, I hoad a pound. Han't ye? Who is 't?"

"Master Dove, I hev made several trials, an' I be willin' to tell 'ee that they den't pint to Mrs. Martin."

"There! I knowed it well 'nough!" cried Dove, triumphantly. "Den't I say 't, Master Murr'll, sir? Den't I say 't, now?"

"But when I made the trials, Master Dove, I was under that evil influence." And Murrell pointed toward the stile.

"What, the tubs? Lord bless 'ee, what difference would they make? Unless yow'd been a-drinkin too much out of 'em."

"I hev drunk nothen out of 'em, Master Dove, an' that weren't my meanin'. My meanin' were, as

I toad 'ee a while back, that silin' my hands with such unbeseemin' traffic hev done injury to my lawful arts—arts that need clean hands above arl things. So that when my trials show nothen agen Mrs. Martin, 'tis mayhap not to be depended on."

"Lord bless 'ee, what difference can a few tubs make, standin' in a larned man's house? 'Taren't in natur. Lord! there's many a good man had thousands, one time an' anoather! If yow hev proved Mrs. Martin no witch 'tis enough, an' arl the tubs in the world can't matter a farden!"

"Is that your opinion then?" Murrell asked, keenly.

"Ay, sarten to say. Stands to reason."

"Well, Master Dove, it ben't mine. But every man hev a right to his own opinion. Now, attend, Master Dove. I hev told yow that I hev made trials that do not pint to Mrs. Martin as a witch. Very good. Now it seems yow be anxious to clear Mrs. Martin. If yow were to tell abroad that I had made the trials, 'twouldn't be well to mention they tubs."

"Well, I wouldn't speak o' them, nohow, o' coase," Roboshobery Dove answered, a little reproachfully; because to give information of illicit tubs was in his eyes the unpardonable sin.

"No, 'twere best not," replied Murrell, the casuist. "If it ben't known I hev meddled in such matters, the better will it be taken that Mrs. Martin be no witch, if that's what yow're wantin'. An' if 'tis your honest opinion (as 'tis *not* mine) that the tubs make no difference, why, arl the more reason for not tellin' what yow've seen to-night. Do 'ee unnerstand?"

Roboshobery Dove, who was no casuist, was not at all sure that he did. But he said, with consideration: "I think I see, Master Murrell, sir. I may give it out, an' stand to't, an' yow'll back me, that Mrs. Martin be no proved witch—summut havin' been wrong in the partic'lars—so long as I keep close about your little games with they tubs. I think that be about the size of it, hey?"

Murrell was disgusted with the coarseness of this interpretation of his argument. But he only said: "Well, well—putt it in what form ye like, so long as we unnerstand. An' now I bid yow good-night, Master Dove, an' thank'ee for your help. Yow den't need——"

Both started at a sharp noise far down the lane. There was a yell, and a sudden clamour of shouts; then a whistle, and the quick noise of scurrying feet. And again there was shouting—one great

and angry voice predominating, it would seem, in mingled orders and curses. And the scurrying feet came nearer.

Dove started off down the lane, and Murrell, after a second's hesitation, followed him. His safest course would have been to shut himself indoors; but curiosity impelled him, and, after all, nobody would be surprised to find him abroad at any hour of the night.

He had scarcely passed the stile when a tall man met him, and instantly seized his arm. "'Tis up with Cloyse," said the man, in a loud whisper; and then Murrell saw that it was Golden Adams.

"'Tis up with Cloyse," repeated Adams, "an' the guard hev arl his tubs. I see 'em comin' 'fore they got him, an' I runned up fust. Get on—get yow away. That hat do shine like a noo tin pot. Get yow away—they're arter the carriers, lickerty-split!"

He dragged the little man a yard, but finding him resisting, said: "Why woant yow come? They'll be here in a bit, I tell 'ee! We doan't want to lose our own lot!"

"Let go my arm, Golden Adams," said Murrell "an' look arter your own business. As for me, I'm done with it. I ask no pay, and I give no

more service. But there be your tubs in the ditch behind the hedge!"

"What?" Adams dropped the arm, took a short run toward the stile, checked, and came back. "What d'ye mean?" he said fiercely, pushing his fist in Murrell's face. "Playin' tricks?"

"The tricks be your own, Golden Adams. The tubs be where I say—the best place I could find for 'em. I take no share, an' I want none of 'em—keep 'em for yourself. I be done with such business. I bear yow no ill will, but I hev reasons of my own."

For a moment it seemed that Adams would knock Murrell down. But at that instant there were three loud signal-shots, and then everything was touched with a pale radiance, for a blue-light was lit on Castle Hill.

Golden Adams turned with a curse, and leaped over the stile. Three or four men, panting hard, came running by Murrell; and behind them ran more. While up the hill came stealing a subtle and pleasant odour, mingling agreeably with the sweet natural scents of the night; and it was the smell of white brandy. For the carriers, unused to the business, and taking no pride in the valiant fulfilment of their charge, as did the carriers of old days, had flung their burdens away and bolted at

the first alarm; and two tubs of brandy, near a hundred degrees above proof and burst in the fall, now advertised their bearers' pusillanimity to every waking nose within half a mile.

Roboshobery Dove came back up-hill at his best pace. Murrell, the trees, the hedges, the cottages, and the backs of the flying carriers were distinguishable now in the pale flickering light of the flare. "Look at 'em!" said Roboshobery, with great contempt. "Every man hulled away his tubs an' run, as though there weren't a chance o' most on 'em gettin' away, tubs and arl! Two score on 'em an' more, arl runnin' like for a wager! Want their mothers with 'em, I count. Lot o' big gals!"

Hadleigh was rousing—was awake. The signal-shots and the tramp of running men had begun it, and most of the sleepers had reached their chamber windows ere the blue light had burned out.

To every man in these parts the blue light of the coastguard was as the trump of Gabriel; and now that the light was burned almost at their own doors all Hadleigh scrambled out of bed, seized the nearest handful of anything resembling clothing, and came to see. Several brought lanterns, most had night-caps, one had a gun, and a few had boots.

"What is't? Where be? Be it the Rooshans? A run o' stuff! The coastguard's got 'em, sarten to say!" So spoke the men of Hadleigh; and the women, too, for they came as readily as the men.

Presently up the lane came the chief officer, swearing now but intermittently, gripping a man by the collar; and with him came one of his men with another prisoner. And it was not long ere it was seen that the chief officer had hold of old Sim Cloyse, while his man had caught an unlucky carrier, an Eastwood man. Young Sim, it seemed, had been knocked over, but for the present had escaped in the dark.

"Come!" cried the chief officer. "I want a horse and cart to hire for the Queen's service, to carry seized goods. If any of you people like to bring me one it shall be paid for. If not, I shall have to rout one out, and take it."

Everybody instantly remembered that somebody else had a horse and cart, but at length there was a general agreement that Banham was the patriot who should serve the Queen, as being carrier by trade, as well as having his cart close at hand. Banham, in fact, was already present in shirt and trousers, with Mrs. Banham in a mysterious white

under-garment, a shawl, and a nightcap; and a train of small Banhams in nothing but their shirts.

The chief officer held both prisoners while his man burned another blue light on a little knoll close at hand, so that the incoming guards should make directly for the spot where they were needed. The display was regarded with great enthusiasm, and it communicated a comic ghostliness to the assemblage. While it continued two men arrived, and took over the captives, so that the chief officer might go with Banham to see the horse harnessed.

Long before this Roboshobery Dove had made little preparations of his own. He was aware of the danger of appearing as the sole fully-dressed person in the crowd (with the exception of Murrell, whose night-walking habits were known), and he had pulled off his coat and waistcoat, and stowed them, with his glazed hat, in a convenient corner. So that now he stood with the rest in his shirt, trousers, and, as usual, one boot; and a handful of the shirt was dragged negligently over his waistband, as an expression of careless haste. And as he stood thus there came to him a sudden and brilliant notion. He resolved to make a speech.

The officer had just gone off with Banham, and

Mrs. Banham had gone to direct and counsel her husband. Murrell was looking on almost unnoticed in the shade behind the villagers. Roboshobery Dove, however, directed the general attention to him by hailing him in a loud voice.

"Master Murr'll, sir!" bawled Roboshobery Dove.

The cunning man gave a start and coughed. "Well, Master Dove," he said quietly, "I be here."

"Master Murr'll, sir," Roboshobery proceeded in the same loud voice, "I think on this here interestin' occasion, arl these here neighbours bein' present together, which is uncommon, I will take the liberty, so to say, o' givin' out a piece o' information I hev received, or heared, from yow. 'Tis as respects Mrs. Martin, neighbours, which hev most unjustly been putt upon for a witch, when stands to reason she coon't be, her son bein' killed fightin' the Rooshans, as be well knowed. Well, neighbours, to make the yarn no longer than need be, Master Murr'll here, which be well knowed as a genelman o' the very primest powerful larnin', hev made sarten performances which prove Mrs. Martin be no witch at arl, but far from it on the contrairy, an' nothen o' the sort; an' if anything ever looked otherwise, it was 'cause the devil muddled the partic'lars, as might ha'

been guessed. So much be arl needed to be said, since oather surprisin' partic'lars, as matters of opinion, I ben't allowed to mention, seein' every man hev a right to his own, as Master Murr'll do sartify. An' so——"

But here Cunning Murrell interrupted. The whole speech was a trifle disconcerting for him; but the latter sentences, which Roboshobery Dove had wished him to take as an artistic and subtle assurance that his secret was safe, put him in alarm. So now he came forward and took up the speech himself.

"Axcuse me, Master Dove," he said, with calm dignity. "'Tis much as Master Dove hev told yow, neighbours, though not said as I might say't. It hev come to be known to me that of late sarten of my lawful trials an' experiments an' inquisitions hev been interfered with an' set wrong by a strange an' unusual matter, which I hev now mastered an' got rid of, an' so needn't try to explain to yow, especially as yow'd never unnerstan' my meanin' if I did. The last experiment that was so made to fail was this evenin' at Master Banham's, as doubtless yow'll hear of at length in the mornin'. The trouble is now made known to me, an' got rid of for the future. I wish yow good-night, neighbours."

Steve Lingood came up and joined the little crowd just as Murrell's explanation finished, and the neighbours, bedazed already by the tumultuous events of the night, began to discuss this new marvel. As they did so, and just as the sound of Banham's cart was heard a little lower in the lane, a shout arose from the meadow behind the stile, over which several fresh coastguardsmen had come, scurrying in from eastward. And at the shout the chief officer left the cart and came running. There was a scuffle behind the hedge, an oath, and a few blows; then a wrangle of cries:—"Hoad him!" "Look out!" "Where be?" "Stop him, damme!" "There he go!" "Here!" "Where be him?" "This way!" "No, he's gone!"

The chief officer rushed at the stile with such a mouthful of salt-sea rhetoric as Hadleigh had never heard before. But he was too late, for Golden Adams had got away.

"But there's a mort o' tubs here in the ditch, sir!" a coastguardsman reported. And the chief officer was appeased when he found there was.

Truly for Hadleigh this was a night of nights, this of the very last run of tubs ever attempted on that coast.

CHAPTER XXVI

AND AFTER

IT was a year—more than a year—ere Hadleigh was again the same quiet Hadleigh that it had been before old Sim Cloyse's last enterprise in contraband. Next year's fair-day put a short check on the matter as a subject of conversation, it is true; but it was restored in a week, and thirty years afterward it was still a convenient topic at the Castle Inn on winter evenings. It is possible that even now some remain who use that bewildering night as the epoch in their calendar, before which and after which they date the births, marriages, deaths, and other happenings of Hadleigh and Leigh, even as the Moslem dates from the flight of his prophet. It was near a week ere the quicker-witted had sorted out the night's adventures in their own minds, and never after did any one of them agree with any other as to how it all came about, or in what order. As for

the slower-witted, they went puzzled to their graves.

But in some way the night's work put a brace to Mrs. Martin's faculties. She brought the revenue men to Castle Hill, and waited at the foot with Dorrily while they crept stealthily to the top; and as soon as it was plain that a seizure was being made and that nothing more remained for her to do, she submitted to go quietly home and to bed. It was a piece of her old life, a revival of her old activity, and it gave her sound and healthy sleep. And in that sleep she slept away the clouds from her mind, waking to something of her old self. For in the morning she gave a loose to her grief for her lost son, such as she had not given before, even when the news was brought her; much, indeed, as though its true meaning were only now made clear.

There was an end, too, of the tale of her witchcraft. There were women who shook their heads still, and others who held it a shame that Cunning Murrell had not been more careful; but most were content, with some shamefacedness, to let the thing drop wholly. They had ever a reluctance to make over-close acquaintance with her, but perhaps the shamefacedness had its part in that; and, in truth,

Mrs. Martin was little perturbed, for she was never a gossip.

Whether or not the thing in any degree shook the popular confidence in Murrell it would be hard indeed to say. Probably not, for Cunning Murrell was an article of faith too long established to be overset by a trifle; and indeed there was no sign of it, though for some little while Ann Pett was regarded with suspicion, because of the adventure in Banham's bake-house. This, however, rather increased than diminished the awe in which the cunning man was held; and soon his fame stood higher than ever, because of certain very notable successes.

One of these was made evident in the case of Dorcas Brooker. For it came to be known that she had looked in Cunning Murrell's famous pail of blackened water, and therein had seen Sam Gill's ship flung on a rock, and wrecked. And truly enough Sam Gill was shipwrecked on the Azores, for he came back himself, sent home to his own parish by charity, and told the tale. And anybody who doubted might go and ask for him at Atkins's, the boatbuilder, where he got work, and behaved very well. And if, now that Atkins's is no more, you still offer to doubt, you may see the

record of the wedding of Samuel Gill and Dorcas Brooker in the Leigh register at this day.

Another triumph was in the case of Em Banham, whom Cunning Murrell cured at last —or at any rate Em Banham *was* cured. He went to work, this time, with more caution, and he used no more iron bottles. Instead he persevered with experiments in physic, using herbs, some stewed, some dried, some chopped, and many made into very large and ugly pills. He persisted so long and so industriously in this treatment that it were a mere absurdity to suggest that in the end the girl grew out of her trouble; and indeed nobody did suggest it. The cure first began to show itself on the next Midsummer Day, when Em Banham went a-fairing with Joe, Dan Fisk's son, and was never melancholic again. Her sister Mag went a-fairing too, with young Sim Cloyse, just as she had done the last time; and there was nothing to mar the joy of that day, nor to quench the smell of peppermint.

And so with a slow and gradual drowsing Hadleigh fell asleep again. The black cottage stood in its place, and in truth neither before he went to gaol nor after he came out did old Sim Cloyse dream of demolishing it; for that was a

project born of a moment's ardent inspiration in the brain of young Sim. The days came and went, and the months; even the back pay and prize-money due to the day of Jack Martin's fatal shore-going came at last, and the tiny pension; and a year went, and another year; and life at the black cottage saw little change.

But in time there came a day—though it was long to wait—when Steve Lingood looked from the high meadows down to the black cottage, and saw in the garden Dorrily Thorn, with a red rose in her hair.

CHAPTER XXVII

FINIS

SIX years were gone, and it was a bright day, and not so cold as it might have been, in December, 1860. Stephen Lingood came up from Leigh by way of the marshes, taking a zig-zag path with care and forethought, for in the winter months it is an easy thing to get into difficulties in boggy spots thereabout. Once on the slope of Castle Hill, however, he was free of the soft places, and climbed with less heed.

He gained the top and stood beside the greatest of the broken towers to look back. It was a view that had not changed for two hundred years and more—since Croppenburgh dammed and dyked Canvey Island—save in one particular. There toward the east and the sea lay Leigh with its red roofs, floating, as it seemed, on the water. There stretched the water, bright in the sunlight, with the grey Kent coast beyond; and there lay

Canvey Island, wide and flat and low, like a patch of duckweed in a pond. Nearer was the Ray, that cut the island off from main Essex; and nearer still the green marshes, where now a boy was jumping, backing, dodging, and jumping again, a mere speck in the distance, trying to out-manœuvre a pony that would not be caught; while a man, a rather bigger speck, climbed a white gate to dodge the pony on the other side. And this was where the one change was. For the white gate closed a path that led across the railway; and the railway stretched, a straight thin brown line, through Casey March from end to end, east and west, and its next station was at Leigh.

Lingood descended the hill behind, and walked up the lane. The black cottage looked down from the bank, but there was a new tenant there now The smith kept his way up the lane along which old Sim Cloyse's tubs had been carried in Banham's cart six years ago, in the time of the war, passed Cunning Murrell's cottage, and come out in Hadleigh street. The hammer rang gaily in the smithy where his new man was at work, but Lingood stopped at his house adjoining—the white cottage with the green door—at the sound of a song within.

"What will you give me, captain, if that pirate I destroy?"
"I'll give you fame, I'll give you gold, you little cabin boy,
And you shall wed my only child, she is my pride and joy,
If you sink 'em in the Lowlands low."
Lowlands! Lowlands!
If you sink 'em in the Lowlands low!

Steve Lingood had no need to peep to know that Roboshobery Dove, with a small girl on the sound knee and a small boy clinging to the wooden leg, was at his favourite amusement in these days, when there were no captured ships to watch for from the Castle loophole, and gardening was stayed till spring. Lingood's wife nodded and smiled from the window, and he went on to the forge.

At Cunning Murrell's, too, there was a change, though a change of a different sort. There in the keeping-room, with all his books, papers, and herbs about him, Cunning Murrell lay a-bed, wasted smaller than ever, though sharp of eye still. He had had the bed brought downstairs, that he might lie here among his treasures, in the place where he had listened to so many secrets, solved so many difficulties, and settled so many destinies. The door had been curtained off with old shawls to give him some privacy from draughts and visitors, and Ann Pett waited on his wants faithfully still.

"Ann Pett," said Murrell, his small voice smaller

than ever, but sharp, though now with something almost childish in it; "Ann Pett, I will hev the book o' conjurations from the drawer—no, no, the long one—and I will read. Doan't make the gruel —I shan't want it."

Ann Pett gave him the manuscript book with its teeming spiders of signs and sigils, and, propped in his bed, he took his iron-rimmed goggles and settled to read. But first he resolved certain business matters.

"If Mrs. Bennett send round for more 'intment," he squeaked, "'tis that in the gallipot on the top shelf, next the window. 'Tis twopence, an' don't let her hev 't without. Ben't as though she couldn't pay it. An' if Simmons's come about the cow send 'em away. I woan't be bothered."

"An' what mus' I say if the noo curate comes agen?"

"Send him away too. I will not hev the noo curate. He knows nothen, that he should come here teachin' me. He be a boy as might be my great gran'son, an' I be the devil's master, as be well knowed. Clargymen den't bother me in the oad time, an' I will not hev this meddlin'. Send him away. . . . What be that noise?"

The old man paused, with his thin grey lips apart, and his hand to his ear.

"'Haps it be the Lunnon railway train," said Ann Pett.

"Ah! the railway train," he repeated absently; "the railway train. . . . Yes, yes." Then he spoke up again. "There be one more thing, Ann, an' the last I hev to tell 'ee. I hev been carled. He who hev given me my cunnin' an' my larnin', and hev putt me in dominion over arl evil things, hev sent for me, an' I shall go—to-morrow, at one o'clock. Ann, yow've been a good darter to me, though dull of unnerstandin'. It grieve me I han't much to leave 'ee. Yow hev little money in hand, I know; but yow shall hev a good gown for once in your life, to wear at the funeral. Look yow in the box under the stairs an' take a sovereign. Get the best frock it will buy, an' if one sovereign ben't enough, yow'll find anoather. An' now leave me, Ann. I shall go, as I tell 'ee—to-morrow—at one o'clock."

And he did, to the minute.

THE END

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